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BROWNING STUDIES

BY

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Dedication

TO

THE STUDENTS

WHO HAVE STUDIED BROWNING WITH ME
IN OBERLIN AND MIDDLEBURY

You must not mind if I dedicate these Studies to you, for most of them were prepared for you and your interest (may I venture to say enthusiasm?) in them is responsible for their publication. Peradventure, if your eyes light on this book, its words may bring to your minds the course in Nineteenth Century Poetry, the gray classroom, and those long and forbidding lists of questions for written tests, to be answered without regard to floods of sunshine or of rain outside the windows. I hope this book may also bring keenly to your thoughts the good friends you found among the English Poets of the nineteenth century and, above all, the imperial soul of Robert Browning. You may be sure that working over these lectures, to revise them somewhat and to get them written out so that some one besides myself can understand the abbreviations, has brought you all many times before my mind's eye and has made more plain to me the eager and generous spirit which so many of you showed and has caused me to realize anew how your spirit helped me to put into orderly presentation something of what has come out of the years of my reading of Browning. And so I dedicate to you now these lectures, because, in a very real sense, they already belong to you.

PREFACE

THESE Browning Studies were given in Oberlin College, in the Department of English in the course on Nineteenth Century Poetry, in the second semester of the year 1908–09, and were repeated in the corresponding semester of the year 1909–10. They constituted a course in the Summer Session of Middlebury College in 1913, and were given here again as a part of the study of Nineteenth Century Poetry in the second semester of the year 1913–14. It should be explained also that the greater part of the study of *The Ring and the Book* was written before those Oberlin days, and that since those days *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, *A Death in the Desert*, and *Reverie* have been added to the list of poems taken up; also that, besides being used in connection with the college classes mentioned above, several of the lectures have been given in various places.

The interest taken by the students in these studies has suggested their publication. They are now printed as given in the classroom, with some revision. Abbreviations are written out more than in the author's notes, but no attempt has been made to reproduce the extemporaneous elaboration and explanation given in the classroom. Lectures which occupied several classroom hours are here sometimes combined into a single chapter.

These studies do not pretend to be exhaustive. They are simply an introduction to some of Browning's best work. They are intended now, as they were in the classroom, for those who have not read Browning at all before, or very little. The idea which people get, that they cannot

understand Browning, is one of those "literary superstitions" which are passed from one to another. I remember well my pleasure when I first seriously tried to read Browning and found that I could do it. A part of the pleasure of teaching Browning, in the courses already referred to, was enjoying the surprise of students, when they found they could read Browning and get something out of him. It is true, however, that in reading Browning a great deal depends on what sort of a start we get, *i.e.* what poems we read first. I do not wonder at the experience of the Cincinnati gentleman (referred to in Chapter II) who began with *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country.* These studies for the classroom were planned with purpose that students might begin Browning right, as far as I could understand from my own experience what is the right way to begin, and, for the same reason, they are now given in printed form in the same order.

I confess that I owe Robert Browning a debt which I can never pay, for it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Browning opened a new world to me. His optimism and his red-blooded joy in the intensity of struggle in the present hour and his stern facing of life have done me an immense good. The optimism of most people makes me more pessimistic and makes the whole situation seem hopeless, because most people's optimism is of a childish sort, due to their good digestion and agreeable experiences and to their ignorance of the evil in the world and their blindness to the beauty and the cruelty of human life. But Robert Browning's optimism is not that of a child, but of a fullgrown man who realizes keenly the worst there is in the world, and yet, in the face of it all, believes in the existence of and the triumph of good. I hold that no man who has found a good thing should keep it for himself alone. Therefore, if Browning has been good for me

and if I can encourage some one else to get acquainted with him, it is my duty and privilege to do so.

A practical suggestion may not be amiss as to a way of using the present book. It should be used never apart from but only alongside a good edition of Browning. It will be well to read the introductory lectures first; then to take up the poems designated in the studies that follow, each poem in turn, reading the matter given in the lecture, then reading the poem, then referring again to the lecture and again to the poem as long as the lecture can be found of any assistance. I shall be glad if the notes and comments I have written down can be of service in some such way as this, but always the poem is the thing.

V. C. H.

MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT,
December 12, 1914.

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BROWNING STUDIES

I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF ROBERT BROWNING

In all the world there is no place with greater store of associations than Westminster Abbey. It is crowded with graves. It seems almost like a vast tomb, instead of a church. Here in dust lie so many great and renowned. Where else can you find so many and famous names as along the walls and on the floor of Westminster Abbey?

And there is no place where the vanity of human life comes in upon your spirit so. In the gloom of that church, one feels very keenly the truth of St. James' words: "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Each time I visited Westminster Abbey, it had the same effect. It is a curious feeling to stand on the stones which cover the graves of those whose names and greatness have been familiar to us from childhood up. Mouths stopped with dust, strong hands disintegrated, brave hearts the helpless prey of corruption, and mighty brain of one after another turned into a handful of earth! "After life's fitful fever," they "sleep well." I know one day I left the church and went out into the cloisters, and walked while the winter sun went down, — and the nothingness of human life, the pitifulness and absurdity of all our struggle, filled the horizon of my thoughts. Such desolate words as the Psalmists

wrote would keep coming into mind with fresh meaning: "We spend our years as a tale that is told." "As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more."

And in Westminster Abbey, I always paused a long time by two graves among the others so crowded in the Poets' Corner. There they lie, side by side, each under a plain slab in the floor,[1] Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning. As they lived, the two lights which outshone all their contemporaries, so they lie there now, — side by side.

There is at once a temptation to compare these two men, and partisan admirers are constantly praising one and disparaging the other. This is quite unnecessary. They are very different. There is room for both. Each supplements the other. Each has his mission and makes his contribution. We defraud ourselves, if we choose either Tennyson or Browning and neglect the other. How these two men felt toward each other may be judged from these two dedications:

(1) Browning's volume of *Selections*, 1872, selected from his works and arranged by himself, with Preface, and

"Dedicated to
Alfred Tennyson
in poetry — illustrious and consummate
in friendship — noble and sincere."

(2) Tennyson's volume *Tiresias and Other Poems*, 1885,

"To my good friend
Robert Browning
whose genius and geniality
will best appreciate what may be best
and make most allowance for what may be worst."

[1] A bust of Tennyson stands not far off.

Nothing could show mutual appreciation and admiration better than these dedications. Then, let not the admirers of either Tennyson or Browning do an injustice to the other.

We have given some weeks to the study of Tennyson. We come now to the study of Robert Browning. After many years of familiarity with Browning's poems, it is with a certain sense of reverence that I turn to them now. "I was not ever thus." In college, I sneered and jeered at Robert Browning. I repeated all the threadbare jokes about the obscurity of his style and nobody's knowing what he meant. I argued that enthusiasm for Browning was a fad and was pretended by men and women who couldn't understand Browning. In all these remarks, in which my college mates usually acquiesced, I thought I was smart. But the fact is that it was all because *I didn't know any better.* That is my only excuse. The day came when I read a statement of Browning's own,[1] that he had never been wilfully obscure, that, if people couldn't understand his poems, he was sorry, for he had tried to say what he meant. It occurred to me that the difficulty in understanding Browning might be one of those "literary superstitions" [2] which get afloat in the world, and I waded into the study of Browning for myself. I found a mine of wealth and beauty. I found a man who faces life unflinchingly,

[1] This statement of Browning's I am not now able to locate. I give it in effect, and I remember it pretty well and especially the impression it made on me. The nearest I find is a statement in a letter written in 1868 to W. G. Kingsland, quoted by Griffin and Minchin, *Life of Robert Browning*, p. 302, where Browning says: "But I never designedly tried to puzzle people, as some of my critics have supposed."

[2] In those days, I did not know this fortunate phrase by which to call such things. The phrase is one of the Rev. A. J. Carlyle's, Fellow of University College, Oxford, and Vicar of St. Martin's and All Saints', in his lectures on Some Common Characteristics of Mediæval Literatures.

whose comprehensive sympathy has wrestled with more of life's problems than anyone in English Literature except Shakespeare. After some years of putting him to the test, often in the night and the storm, I can only say in bluntest simplest manner, *Robert Browning has helped me live.* I am not the only one — I have seen it in many others. Better acquaintance with Browning has won to his side many who opposed or laughed at him. A friend of mine told me that in his class in Princeton some of the men who seemed most unlikely to do so became enthusiastic for Browning in taking a course in which his works were studied. It seldom fails that the fondness for Browning grows with the years of acquaintance. He wears well. I am not a blind partisan of Browning. I see his defects. But I know also the soul-satisfying quality of his thoughts. Robert Browning will bring something into the life of anyone who sincerely studies his poems. When things get thick, you will find Robert Browning standing by you. He has been through it, and has not flinched. The fact that there could be such a man as he was makes me believe more in humanity. And the words which he has penned have been to many almost like food and drink in the desert.

This confession I make for your sakes. Let me ask you, then, to put away your prejudices and to reserve your judgment until we are done with these weeks of Browning study, lest you be found pronouncing judgment on yourselves, as I did in my college days.

I. About the Books

1. Of Browning's Works, as far as one-volume editions are concerned, the *Globe Edition*, edited by Augustine Birrell, New York, The Macmillan Co., is the best. No one-volume edition of Browning can be altogether satis-

factory, there is so much matter to put in. The Globe Edition was formerly (1896–1907) published in two volumes, but by the use of thinner paper, from 1907 on, it has been put into one volume, of something over 1300 pages. This was the edition used by the students to whom these lectures were delivered, and therefore the references in these lectures are to the pages and lines of this edition.

2. A good edition is the *Camberwell Browning*, with introductions and notes by Miss Charlotte Porter and Miss Helen A. Clarke, 12 vols., New York, T. Y. Crowell & Co., 1898.[1] The volumes are sold separately as well as in sets, and, on this account, the numbers are in small Arabic numerals at the bottom of the back. The notes are a great assistance, but unfortunately are not always accurate, and sometimes provoke dissent.[2] This edition may be had also with Miss Porter and Miss Clarke's *Browning Study Programmes*, two vols. uniform with the others, making 14 vols. in all.

3. The best biography of Browning is *The Life of Robert Browning, with Notices of his Writings, his Family, and his Friends*, by W. Hall Griffin, completed and edited by Harry Christopher Minchin, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1910. This is done with great care and thoroughness.

4. Any mention of important books for Browning study should include Edmund Gosse's *Robert Browning: Personalia*, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1890. These *Personalia* are from notes supplied by Robert Browning himself.

5. Mrs. Sutherland Orr's *Life and Letters of Robert*

[1] This is the same as the *Arno Edition* which was published by Geo. D. Sproul, New York, 1899, (no longer issued).

[2] For a case in which we are obliged to dissent, see our note on the word "Lathen," Appendix C of the present volume.

Browning, published in two vols., 1891, (and in a one-vol. edition the same year), has been esteemed an indispensable source of information, and so it is. The author of it, Mrs. Alexandra Leighton Orr, became an intimate friend of the Brownings, and had in hand much unusual material for a biography. But, because of haste and inaccuracy, the biography proved unsatisfactory to the poet's son and other relatives.[1] There has been issued, however, a new and enlarged edition, revised by Frederic G. Kenyon, one vol., Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1908.

6. Mrs. Orr's *Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning*, published in 1885, is now in its eleventh edition and is very good. This Handbook was approved by Robert Browning himself, and his son's attitude toward it, in the same conversation with Prof. Phelps referred to in our footnote, confirms that approval. It is published by Geo. Bell & Sons of London; The Macmillan Co., New York.

7. A very useful and reliable book is George Willis Cooke's *Guide-Book to the Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning*, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1891. It will commend itself to anyone who refers to its pages to any extent.

8. One of the most valuable books for general reference is *The Browning Cyclopædia* by Edward Berdoe, 1st edition 1891, 7th edition 1912, London, George Allen & Co. Ltd.; New York, The Macmillan Co. This book is sometimes disappointing. Dr. Berdoe cannot avoid reading into Browning too much of his own Roman Catholic faith and his zeal against vivisection and such methods of re-

[1] See article by Prof. Wm. Lyon Phelps, *Robert Browning as Seen by his Son*, in the *Century Magazine*, Jan., 1913, (vol. LXXXV, no. 3), pp. 417–420 — especially Mr. Barrett Browning's remarks about this biography, on p. 418.

search.[1] But the book is a vast collection of information on Browning's writings and things referred to by Browning, and is an exceedingly handy "business book" for Browning study.

9. A list of some of the other editions now in print of Browning's works, and of books about Browning, which would naturally stand here, has been transferred to the end of the present volume of lectures. For further details in this line, the reader is therefore referred to Appendix A. We have no desire to bury up Browning in books about him. Browning's own words are the main thing, and any books about him and his writings are useful only as they send readers to his own words with greater eagerness and better understanding. It is a pitiful thing to be always reading "about it and about" and miss the thing itself. The placing of the list at the end of the volume instead of at this point does not, however, at all imply that books there mentioned fall short in value or in ability to lead the reader to Browning himself, but only that it is better that such a list should stand there. The list, although at the end of the book, is in the reader's hands, to be referred to at any time.

II. Dates outlining Browning's Life

The following dates[2] will serve as a sort of outline of Browning's life:

[1] Cf. his attempt (7th ed., p. 105) to interpret a part of *Childe Roland* in some such way. Browning was against vivisection, but he was not arguing against anything of the sort in *Childe Roland*.

[2] The dates have been checked up by Griffin and Minchin's *Life of Robert Browning*. In revising the present lecture I have depended on the same biography also for accurate details. So many accounts of Browning's life are vague and deal so much in misleading generalities that it is an unalloyed pleasure to real the careful and painstaking work of Griffin and Michin.

1. 1812, May 7, Robert Browning was born, in Camberwell, a suburb of London on its southern side. His sister Sarah Anna[1] was born Jan. 7, 1814. These were the only children in the family. The house in which they were born stood in Southampton St., near Dowlas Common which came to be called Cottage Green and is now built up although the name Cottage Green remains. While Sarah Anna was still an infant, the family moved into another house on the same street, and about 1824 they moved from that house to Hanover Cottage, also in Southampton St., and this they occupied for 16 years.

2. 1820–26 (or 1821–26), from the time when he was eight or nine years old until he was fourteen, the boy attended the Rev. Thomas Ready's school, in Peckham about a mile from home.

3. 1828, Oct., Browning began study in London University.[2] He was then 16 years old. His name was entered under date of June 30, 1828, but classes did not begin until the Fall Term. The studies were Greek, Latin, and German. He continued for one term, but left abruptly during the second term, some time after Christmas. This was his only college education.

4. 1829, in the spring, he decided on poetry for his life-work.

[1] Her name stands Sarah Anna written by her father's hand in the family Bible (record copied by Griffin and Minchin and printed at the beginning of their *Life of Browning*), but the two names became later combined into Sarianna.

[2] This institution from its inception in 1825 was known as London University, but received a charter in 1836 as *University College*. Hence the confusion in references to Browning's studying there, — some saying he studied at London University, some saying at University College, London. It was called London University when Browning attended it. University College, London, still continues on the original site. The fact that up to 1836 it was called London University should not confuse it with the present University of London.

5. 1834, he travelled to St. Petersburg with Chevalier George de Benkhausen, the Russian Consul-General to England. Left London Saturday, Mch. 1, and was back in England in three months.

6. 1838, first[1] visit to Italy. Sailed on the afternoon of Friday, April 13, landed at Trieste May 30, and arrived at Venice Wednesday morning, June 1. Within the next three weeks he visited many of the cities in that part of Italy, and returned to Venice. Then went to Verona, and journeyed home by way of the Tyrol and the Rhine.

7. 1840, Dec., the Browning family left Camberwell and moved to Hatcham, another suburb. The poet made his home with his parents until his marriage.

8. 1844, his second Italian journey, leaving England in the summer and returning in December.

9. 1845, May 20, Robert Browning first met Elizabeth Barrett. She had received her first letter from him on Jan. 10, 1845, but it was some months before he could see her.

10. 1846, Sept. 12, Saturday, about noon or a little before, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett were married at St. Marylebone Church, London. It was a secret marriage, her two sisters knowing it, but her father not knowing. The only witnesses were Miss Barrett's maid and Browning's cousin James Silverthorne.

11. 1846, Sept. 19, Saturday afternoon (just a week later), she stole out of her father's house, No. 50 Wimpole St., London, with her maid and her spaniel, Flush, went around the corner to Hodgson's bookstore in Great Marylebone St. and met Robert Browning. They took the 5:00

[1] "This was Browning's first Italian visit; he did *not*, as has been repeatedly stated, visit Italy in 1834." — Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, pp. 94, 95, footnote.

P.M. train for Southampton, and so to Paris and from there to Italy. Her father never forgave her and never saw her again.

12. 1846–47, they spent the winter in Pisa.

13. 1847, April, they came to Florence. At first they took furnished apartments in the Via delle Belle Donne, close to the Piazza Santa Maria Novella. That summer, leaving those apartments to seek cooler quarters, they took a suite of rooms up one flight of stairs [1] in the Casa Guidi,[2] south of the Arno, at the corner of the Via Maggio and the Via Mazetta, almost opposite the Pitti Palace. In October, they moved to other furnished rooms in the Piazza Pitti, to get more sunlight for the winter.

14. 1848, May, they leased the flat in the Casa Guidi which they had occupied the summer before, — seven rooms, the favorite suite of the last Count Guidi. They took the rooms unfurnished, paying an annual rental of 25 guineas (between $125 and $130). This was their home. They often travelled and sometimes rented their flat furnished, in their absence, but returned here when they came "home."

15. 1848, summer, they travelled on the east side of Italy, visiting Fano, Ancona, Rimini, and Ravenna.

16. 1849, Mch. 9, their son, Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning,[3] was born in the Casa Guidi. He was their only child.

17. 1849, Robert Browning's mother died this year,

[1] The rooms are on what in Europe is called the first floor, *i.e.* the floor up one flight, not the street floor. In America, we usually call that the second floor.

[2] So named from the fact that it was formerly the residence of the Counts Guidi. Casa signifies "house," or "home."

[3] Usually spoken of, in later years, as Mr. R. Barrett Browning, or Mr. Barrett Browning.

at the home of the family in Hatcham. Her death occurred soon after the poet's son was born.

18. 1849, July–Oct., Browning and his wife and their boy spent the summer at the Baths of Lucca. There are three villages in the narrow valley, — the lowest called Ponte, the next Alla Villa, and the third Bagni Caldi. The Brownings occupied a house in the third and highest village.

19. 1851, after nearly five years' absence, they came to London, stopping a month in Venice, and stopping also at Padua and Milan, crossing the Alps by coach over the St. Gotthard Pass, and spending several weeks in Paris. They arrived in London late in July, and started back to Paris Sept. 25.

20. 1851–52, they spent the winter in Paris. In Nov. the poet's father and sister visited them there. In April the lease which his father had on the house at Hatcham expired, and he and his daughter settled in Paris that spring. This was their permanent residence from that time till the father's death.

21. 1852, end of June, the poet and his wife and son returned to London and spent the summer there, and set out for Italy again early in Nov. They arrived at the Casa Guidi in Florence after an absence of 16 months.

22. 1853, summer, again at the Baths of Lucca, this time in the middle village, Alla Villa. Returned to Florence in Oct., but stayed only a short time.

23. 1853–54, their first winter in Rome. Returned to Florence near the end of May, 1854.

24. 1855, they returned to London, arriving there the second week in June. From there they went to Paris in October.

25. 1855–56, winter spent in Paris.

26. 1856, near the end of June, they went back to England again, and spent the summer in London, and at Ventnor and West Cowes, on the Isle of Wight, — starting back to Italy from London in October.

27. 1856–57, winter in Florence. In April, 1857, Mrs. Browning's father died in London.

28. 1857, July–Oct., spent again at Alla Villa, the middle village of the Baths of Lucca.

29. 1857–58, another winter in Florence.

30. 1858, in the spring, started for France, arriving in Paris on the birthday of the poet's father. Stayed two weeks in Paris, and then they all (Browning and his family, and his father and his sister) went to Normandy and stayed eight weeks by the seaside in the outskirts of Havre. Returned to Paris for four weeks more. Then started for Italy Oct. 12. Stayed only a month in Florence.

31. 1858–59, wintered in Rome. The winter climate of Rome was found to be better for Mrs. Browning's health than the winter climate of Florence. So three consecutive winters were spent in Rome.

32. 1859, May, returned to Florence. August, went to Siena for the rest of the summer; lived in the Villa Alberti at Marciano, two miles out of the city. Left there in the autumn and stopped briefly in Florence.

33. 1859–60, winter in Rome.

34. 1860, summer was spent at the same house occupied the preceding summer, near Siena. Returned to Rome in Sept.

35. 1860–61, winter in Rome.

36. 1861, spring, Mrs. Browning, whose health had been growing more frail for several years, had a sharp and alarming attack and it seemed as if she would strangle. But she recovered sufficiently to travel to Florence. They

arrived in Florence June 6. The last stage of her illness began on June 23, but she was not confined to her room until the 28th. Even then she thought she was better in the evening.

37. 1861, June 29, about four o'clock in the morning, Mrs. Browning died, in the Casa Guidi. There is a tablet on the house, placed there by the municipality of Florence, with an inscription by the Italian poet and patriot Tommaseo:[1]

> "Here wrote and died Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who . . . made of her verse a golden link between Italy and England."

38. 1861, Aug., Browning came to Paris with his son. He never saw Florence again. That summer he spent some weeks, his father and sister with him, at St. Enoget. He came with his boy to London in October. After some months, he leased a house, No. 19 Warwick Crescent, — at first temporarily, but it proved satisfactory and he kept it. This was his home for the next 25 years.

39. 1862, spring, he was offered the editorship of the *Cornhill Magazine*, but declined it.

40. 1862, summer at Cambo and Biarritz in France.

41. 1865, he visited Oxford to see Benjamin Jowett, Senior Tutor (afterwards Master) of Balliol, with a view to putting his son in College. Jowett's friendship meant much to Browning in the years that followed.

42. 1866, his father died in Paris, and Robert Browning took his sister Sarianna to London to make her home with him. She never married. They were constant companions from that time.

[1] The inscription is in Italian on the tablet, complete as follows: "Qui scrisse e mori Elizabetta Barrett Browning, che in cuore di donna conciliava scienza di dotto e spirito di poeta, e fece del suo verso aureo anello fra Italia e Inghilterra. Pone questa lapide Firenze grata 1861."

43. 1866, summer, spent at Croisic in Brittany, as was also the summer of the year following. Several other summers were spent in Brittany (those of 1869 and '70 were at St. Aubin). On their summer holidays 1873–77, in France and Switzerland, Miss Anne Egerton Smith was with the Brownings.

44. 1867, Browning received from the University of Oxford the degree of M.A. The same year he was made Honorary Fellow of Balliol College.

45. 1868, he was offered the position of Lord Rector[1] of St. Andrews University, but declined it.

46. 1875, the Lord Rectorship of the University of Glasgow was offered to him, but he declined it. He declined it again in 1884.

47. 1878, Browning visited Venice and Asolo again, breaking the journey at the Splügen Pass. He had not seen Italy for 17 years. He had not been in Asolo for 40 years. From 1878 on, his autumns were usually spent in north Italy, stopping somewhere on the way in the Alps during five or six of the warmer weeks preceding. Only three autumns was he prevented by circumstances from going to Italy—1882, 1884, and 1886. He did not go further south than Venice. Venice held him by strong affection.

48. 1879, he received the degree of LL.D. from Cambridge University.

49. 1881, the Browning Society of London was founded. The chief movers were Dr. F. J. Furnivall and Miss Emily Hickey. There were soon branches in many parts of the United Kingdom. The forming of this Society was a great compliment to Robert Browning, and its discussions and publications increased materially the sale of his works.

[1] *i.e.* President of the University, to use the title which goes with the similar office in the majority of American universities.

50. 1882, Browning received the degree of D.C.L. from Oxford University.

51. 1884, he received the degree of LL.D. from the University of Edinburgh.

52. 1885, Browning's son went with him and his sister to Venice. He had not been there since he was a child. The idea of buying a palace in Venice took hold upon Browning and his son on this visit, and a purchase was almost concluded, but came to naught.

53. 1887, June, Browning gave up the house on Warwick Crescent, London, which had been his home for so many years, and took a better and roomier house in De Vere Gardens.

54. 1887, Oct., his son married Fannie Coddington, of New York.

55. 1888, Aug., on his way to Venice this year, Browning's stop was at Primiero in the Dolomite Alps. His son had bought the Rezzonico Palace (Palazzo Rezzonico) on the Grand Canal, although he had not yet moved in. But this was a special inducement to Browning to make the journey to Venice, and he stayed there unusually long.

56. 1889, Feb., he was again in London.

57. 1889, summer, Browning visited all his favorite haunts in England, not knowing that it was his last visit.

58. 1889, that summer, Mrs. Arthur Bronson, an American lady in whose house in Venice Browning and his sister had stayed so many times, urged them to come and visit her in Asolo. She had there a house, "La Mura," which was niched in one of the towers of the city wall and which she occupied when the weather was hot in Venice. To Asolo, then, on their way to Venice, the poet and his sister came, toward the end of the summer, and here they spent a number of weeks.

59. 1889, Nov. 1, Browning and his sister arrived at his son's house in Venice. Late in November, after his usual walk, it was noticed that Browning had a cold. He never would take much care of himself.[1] The cold developed into bronchitis and on Dec. 1 his son's physician was called. The bronchitis grew better, but symptoms developed, threatening heart-failure. On the evening of Dec. 12, he himself was aware that the end was near.

60. 1889, Dec. 12, Thursday, at 10:00 P.M., Robert Browning died without pain, in the Palazzo Rezzonico, his son's house in Venice. Upon this house the city of Venice has placed a tablet to Robert Browning, which contains two lines of his own:[2]

"Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it, 'Italy.'"

61. 1889, Dec. 15, Sunday, a private funeral service was held in the house, and then the body was taken, as the Venetian law requires, to the mortuary island San Michele and placed in the chapel there. The ceremony of transferring the body to this place was very impressive, — a great flotilla of gondolas following the funeral barge.

62. 1889, Dec. 31, Robert Browning was buried in Westminster Abbey.

[1] Cf. what Barrett Browning said to Prof. Phelps of his father's last illness in the article in the *Century Magazine*, Jan., 1913, already referred to.

[2] The inscription reads:

A
ROBERTO BROWNING
MORTO IN QUESTO PALAZZO
IL 12 DICEMBRE 1889
VENEZIA
POSE

The lines from Browning are below toward the right hand corner. They are from "*De Gustibus* —" Browning's Works, Globe Ed., p. 239, ll. 17, 18. It may be necessary to repeat that, throughout these lectures, the references to Browning's works are made to the Globe Edition, 1 vol., New York, 1907.

III. A More Connected Account of Browning's Life

Within the framework of these bare dates took place the earthly experience of the man who wrote at the age of twenty:[1]

"I am made up of an intensest life."

That intensity of life increased rather than diminished, as the years went by. As Stopford Brooke[2] well says: "It was a life lived fully, kindly, lovingly, at its just height, from the beginning to the end."

1. Robert Browning's father, also named Robert Browning, held a position in the Bank of England.[3] He was born in 1782, in Battersea, a suburb lying on the bank of the Thames, southwest of London. He was, on his father's side, of an old English family, the Brownings of Dorsetshire and Wiltshire. His mother was a West Indian lady[4] who owned a large estate at St. Kitt's. She died when he was seven years old. He was sent to the West Indies at the age of twelve, on account of his father's second marriage, but, when he grew older, refused to stay on the plantation because of his hatred of slavery, and returned to England at the age of twenty, and presently secured a clerkship in the Bank. With his position in the Bank,

[1] In *Pauline*, p. 5, l. 3.

[2] Stopford A. Brooke, *The Poetry of Robert Browning*, New York, 1902, p. 441.

[3] He was connected with the Bank nearly 50 years, 1803–1852.

[4] Many accounts of Browning's life speak of his father's mother as a "creole." The word is avoided here simply because it is so misunderstood. The word creole correctly used does not at all imply that there is any admixture of African blood. It is properly applied to descendants of French or Spanish settlers in the vicinity of the Gulf of Mexico, as in Louisiana, Florida, or the West Indies.

he had money enough and time enough for intellectual development and the accumulation of a fine collection of books. He had immense vitality, unusual skill in drawing, great intellectual keenness, and wide and various learning. Something of the ideals and moral fiber of the man may be seen in the fact that, because he could not tolerate slavery, he sacrificed the plantation inherited from his mother, which would have yielded him wealth.

2. His wife, Sarah Anna[1] Wiedemann, the mother of Robert Browning the poet, was of mixed Scotch-German blood, — daughter of a Scotch mother and a German father, William Wiedemann, a shipowner at Dundee, who had come from Hamburg. She was born in Dundee, but she and her sister resided for some time with an uncle in Camberwell. She did not have the vigorous health which her husband had and, in the latter part of her life especially, suffered much from neuralgia. She was gentle, deeply religious,[2] and passionately fond of music.

3. We hear it said that "blood will tell." It told in the case of the poet Robert Browning. (*a*) From his father he received splendid health and almost inexhaustible vitality, intellectual eagerness and capacity, and a taste for art. (*b*) From his mother, a thoroughly German metaphysical turn of mind, a fondness for music and ability in music, and a deeply reverent and sometimes mystical attitude toward the things invisible and eternal.

[1] So stands the name in her husband's hand-writing in the family Bible:

"Robert Browning married to Sarah Anna Wiedemann at Camberwell Feb 19 1811."

(Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, p. 1).

Her name and her daughter's are usually written Sarianna.

[2] Browning's mother became a member of the Congregational Church in York St., Walworth, in 1806, and his father, though brought up in the Church of England, joined the Congregational Church in 1820.

4. One of Browning's earliest recollections is of himself sitting on his father's knee before the fire in the library, listening with rapt attention as his father told him the tale of the siege of Troy, while he heard his mother in the next room singing a low Gaelic lament. It would not be strange, if that boy should amount to something.

5. Camberwell, where the boy was born, though now really built up with London south of the Thames, was then a village, lying between the slopes of Denmark Hill, Herne Hill, and Champion Hill. Its church tower could be seen from the Thames bridges. Camberwell and its vicinity were well-known as a place of rural beauty,[1] — with bright fields, hedgerows, and fine trees. The two strains of interest which gave such equilibrium to Browning's life were both here at the beginning, — the world of Nature around him, the teeming city and the "world of men" [2] just at hand.

6. Robert Browning was chiefly a self-educated man. (*a*) The beginning of his education was found in the storehouse of his father's mind, and, as years went on, it was continued in his father's books. (*b*) He was sent to a day-school, taught by a woman near his home, but had to be removed because he was so much more proficient in reading and spelling than the other pupils were that it aroused the jealousy of their parents. (*c*) He was very fond of outdoor life and sports, and of all living things. In the course of the years, his pets included owls, monkeys, magpies, hedgehogs, an eagle, a toad, and two snakes.

[1] It is significant that a butterfly, the *Vanessa antiopa*, rare in England though common in central and southern Europe, was found in Camberwell so much more frequently than anywhere else that its common name is the Camberwell Beauty.

[2] Browning, *Parting at Morning*, p. 228, l. 30:

"And the need of a world of men for me."

(*d*) From the age of eight or nine until he was fourteen he attended, as a weekly boarder, a school conducted by the Rev. Thomas Ready and his sisters in Peckham. He was first taught and looked after by the Misses Ready, and, as he grew older, he was taught by Mr. Ready himself. It was a good school, as schools went in those days, but he was always impatient with the petty and mechanical teaching to which he was subjected, and got more from the days spent at home on the hill above the church or in the library with his father's books. When he was nearly thirty, passing Ready's school with Alfred Domett, he spoke of "the disgust[1] with which he always thought of the place," and fifty years after those schooldays he told Domett that "they taught him nothing there." (*e*) From the age of 14 onward, he went on with his studies at home, — two years with a tutor in French, two teachers in music (one for theory and the other for technique), much reading, and lessons in dancing, riding, boxing, and fencing. (*f*) His only other attendance at school was at London University in Gower St., in the founding of which his father was a shareholder, subscribing £100. The boy began there the fall after he was sixteen. It is usually said that his chief study was Greek. He continued less than two terms. This was the only college education he ever received, and with this his formal education stopped, although he attended, during the year following, some of Dr. Blundell's lectures at Guy's Hospital. (*g*) But though his formal education had ceased, he had just begun. All that vast education which makes him the most learned man that ever wrote English verse he accumulated for himself in the years that followed.

[1] Commenting on this remark, Griffin and Minchin explain that what disgusted him was the restraint put upon his imaginative faculties.

7. At the age of 17, in the spring following his college experience, Robert Browning deliberately looked life in the face and deliberately decided to make poetry his life-work. He went at once into his preparation for it, one of his first moves being to read and digest the whole of Dr. Samuel Johnson's Dictionary. Then he plunged into reading, at his home in Camberwell and especially in the British Museum.

8. His first published literary work was *Pauline*, written when he was 20 years old. The date at the end of the poem, Oct. 22, 1832, is the date of the conception of the plan of which *Pauline* is a part. On that evening he had seen Edmund Kean play in *Richard III* at Richmond. The date of the Introduction, London, January, 1833, is the date of the completion of this fragment, — the only part of the work ever written. No publisher would take the risk on it. His aunt, Mrs. James Silverthorne, furnished the money [1] to pay for its publication. It was published, without the author's name, by Saunders and Otley, London, 1833.

The poem is crude and amateurish but full of unusual promise. On the fly leaf of his own copy now in the Dyce and Forster Library at the South Kensington Museum, there is, in Browning's handwriting, this: "The following poem was written in pursuance of a foolish plan which occupied me mightily for a time, and which had for its object the enabling me to assume and realize I know not how many different characters. . . . Only this crab remains of the shapely Tree of Life in this Fool's Paradise of mine. — R. B." The poem was soon for-

[1] Mrs. Silverthorne was his mother's sister Christiana. Griffin and Minchin (p. 57) relate that she gave him £30 to defray the cost of publishing *Pauline;* the cost was £26 5*s*., and the rest was spent for advertising.

gotten,[1] and Dante Gabriel Rossetti discovered a copy of it in the British Museum 20 years afterward and guessed it was by Browning who reluctantly acknowledged it. In the Preface to his Works, Edition of 1868, Browning says: "The first piece in the series I acknowledge and retain with extreme repugnance, and indeed purely of necessity," and goes on to explain that he includes it in order to forestall unauthorized reprints of it.

The poem is dominated entirely by the spirit of Shelley, who is frequently addressed as "Sun-treader," *e.g.*

> "Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever!"[2]
> "Sun-treader, I believe in God and truth
> And love."[3]

Shelley had come into Browning's life with tremendous force near the end of Browning's sixteenth year,[4] through a copy of a little pirated edition of *Queen Mab* displayed on a second-hand bookstall with a label attached: "Mr. Shelley's Atheistical Poem; very scarce." This the boy bought and devoured. Under its influence,[5] he professed himself an atheist. His mother bought Shelley's works, *i.e.* all of his books of which a copy could be obtained, and presented them to her son on his sixteenth birthday. He soon gave up his atheism, but didn't lose faith in Shelley, thinking he had simply misunderstood him, — which was the case: Shelley is no atheist.

[1] At its publication the book received a long notice in the *Monthly Repository* and a notice also in *The Athenæum.*

[2] P. 3, l. 63. [3] P. 13, ll. 81, 82.

[4] Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, p. 51.

[5] Shelley's long note in connection with his *Queen Mab* also converted Browning to vegetarianism, to which he stuck stubbornly for two years, — until weakened eyesight caused him to abandon it.

Through acquaintance with Shelley's writings, he came also to read Keats.

Pauline, deep-dyed with Shelley's spirit, has both autobiographical and literary value. And the potency is there of that splendid imagination and intensity of soul which mark the mature work of Browning. Surely, no boy who writes at twenty these lines [1] will fail to write well in later years: To Shelley —

> "Thou must be ever with me, most in gloom
> If such must come, but chiefly when I die,
> For I seem, dying, as one going in the dark
> To fight a giant: but live thou for ever
> And be to all what thou hast been to me!"

9. Browning's first long journey was taken when he was almost 22. Then he went to St. Petersburg on invitation of the Russian Consul-General who had to make a trip to his capital on a special mission. Browning went nominally as his Secretary. The packets of the General Steam Navigation Co. were running from London to Ostend and Rotterdam. Presumably these travellers landed at Rotterdam, but beyond that they were obliged to drive 1500 miles in mail coaches or by private conveyances, to reach their destination. The journey to Russia contributed vastly to the eager mind of Browning, but did not strike the chord in him which Italy did. A visit to north Italy in 1838 brought him under the spell of that country, and he went again for a second visit six years later. He called Italy his university.

10. Returning late in 1844 from his second Italian travel, Browning took up a copy of the *Poems* of Elizabeth Barrett published that summer, and found himself, in *Lady Geraldine's Courtship* (Stanza XLI), classed with Wordsworth and Tennyson. He was much pleased, not only at what was said of himself, but pleased with the

[1] P. 13, ll. 85–89.

Poems in general. The book was meeting with great success, and many were writing to Miss Barrett to express their approval. Urged by John Kenyon, her cousin, Browning finally wrote to her. This began the correspondence which led to their meeting and falling in love. They had been interested in each other's writings for some years and in each other's treatment at the hands of the critics and the public, and each had known something of the attitude of the other. As early as 1841, Mr. Kenyon had desired to introduce Browning to his cousin, but she did not feel physically equal to meeting him.

Elizabeth Barrett had a rare mind but frail health, and had been, when Browning met her, an invalid for seven years, following upon the rupturing of a bloodvessel in the lungs. The Barrett family lived in Wimpole St., London, in a house which her father bought in 1838. After that, she had been in Torquay some time for her health, but it was even further shattered by grief at the drowning of her favorite brother, Edward, who was with her there, in July, 1840. She had gotten back to London and for five years she hardly got out of the house, except for a few hours at rare intervals. Most of the time she did not leave her room, and seldom saw anyone but members of the family. As was inevitable, she was morbid and discouraged, and at the age of 39 (she was six years older than Browning) she considered that her life was over.

Into her illness and gloom came the abounding vitality and love of Robert Browning. She felt keenly that she was unworthy [1] to be a mate for her princely lover. How much she felt the wonder and the beauty of the fact that he loved her may be gathered from her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Of course, these have nothing to do with

[1] She speaks in this vein in many of the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

Portuguese.[1] The name serves as a blind to conceal how they came out of her own life. No more exquisite sonnets are to be found in the English language. They stand undimmed beside Shakespeare's own. They were drawn from her "heart's ground," as she says, in those days when Browning was making love to her. She fought against it for a long time from a sense of duty. Her father was a strange man and very much opposed to any of his children's marrying.[2] When they did so, he practically disowned them. On account of her ill-health, his attitude in her case would be even more severe than in the case of the others. But Robert Browning had found his affinity, and was not the man to be discouraged.

The love-letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett have been published[3] by their son. It was a pitiful thing to do. Such letters should be destroyed. They are not for the cold critical public eye. Those letters meant much to the lovers, but they do not mean so much to us. There is in them too little restraint. In Browning's love-poems, no matter how intense the passion, there is splendid restraint. In these letters, one misses the fine element of restraint too much. It is too bad that

[1] Browning never saw these Sonnets until the winter after they were married. She slipped the manuscript into his pocket one morning in Pisa. The Sonnets were privately printed at Reading in 1847 without title except "Sonnets by E. B. B." In 1850, they were published with the present title, suggested by Mr. Browning, apropos of his wife's poem *Catarina to Camoens*. What makes the name appropriate is the fact that one of the best sonnet-writers was the great Portuguese poet Camoens (c. 1524–1579). In a library of high rank, I have found these sonnets of Mrs. Browning's catalogued as Translations!

[2] Elizabeth Barrett was the eldest of eleven children. Her mother died in 1828.

[3] *Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, 1845–1846*, 2 vols. New York, Harper and Bros., 1899.

they were published. But Browning had carefully preserved them, while he had destroyed a great number of other letters, and his son was not willing that they should fall into other hands and be published very likely in some garbled form. He could hardly bring himself to destroy them. So he gave them to the public in their entirety exactly as they were. It should be added that they contain much that is of biographical value, besides their reference to the years 1845–46.

11. In the summer of 1845, Miss Barrett grew stronger, and her physician thought her able to travel to Italy and recommended that she should spend the following winter in Pisa, then a favorite climatic resort. Her father would not give his consent and continued rigid in his refusal. Such was the situation for a year. Meantime Robert Browning continued calling once or twice a week, writing many letters, and sending her flowers.[1] It was learned from her father that her going to Italy under any circumstances would be "under his heaviest displeasure," and it was plain that it would be worse than useless for Browning to ask her father for her hand in marriage. It seemed to Browning and to her that the circumstances justified their taking affairs into their own hands. Therefore, they were secretly married at St. Marylebone Church on Sept. 12, 1846, and, just a week later, they left for Paris, where they joined Mrs. Jameson and her niece. After a week in Paris, they started for Italy, Mrs. Jameson and her niece with them. They went by way of Orleans and Lyons to Marseilles, and from there by sea to Leghorn, and so to Pisa.

[1] Cf. the sonnet beginning:

"Beloved, thou hast sent me many flowers,"

No. XLIV, in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* as they now stand.

12. Mr. and Mrs. Browning stayed that winter in Pisa, and in the following April went to Florence. That summer, they occupied for the first time the rooms in the Casa Guidi which in May of the year 1848 became their headquarters, and with which their married life from that time on is associated. They were away much of the time: One summer they visited the towns in the vicinity of the upper east coast of Italy, three summers they were at the Baths of Lucca, four summers they were in England, one summer in France, two summers near Siena, two winters in Paris, four winters in Rome. But they always kept the apartments in the Casa Guidi. It was here that their boy was born Mch. 9, 1849.

13. Mrs. Browning's writings were very successful and brought in some income. But Robert Browning's works had no such experience. All his works before his marriage, except *Strafford*, had been published at the expense of his relatives: His aunt, as we have noted, furnished the money for the publication of *Pauline;* his father paid for the publication of *Paracelsus*, *Sordello*, and all the eight numbers of the *Bells and Pomegranates*. All these books had met with only a small sale at best. He had to borrow £100 from his father at the time of his marriage and journey with his wife to Italy. The chief work of his married life, the two volumes of *Men and Women*, fared somewhat better, but even these volumes did not meet anything like the recognition they deserved. Fortunately Mr. and Mrs. Browning were not dependent on an income from their writings. Mrs. Browning had inherited quite an amount by the will of her uncle Samuel Barrett, and, at the time of her marriage, had £8000 so invested that it yielded £300 a year. Ever after the birth of their son, her cousin John Kenyon had allowed them £100 a year

(against Browning's wishes), and when Mr. Kenyon died in 1856, he left them £11000. So they were able to follow their ideals, without the bread and butter question staring them constantly in the face.

14. Mrs. Browning's health, for years after the marriage, was much improved. Of course, it is very hazardous to marry a sick woman, an invalid. But in this case, the event justified the marriage. Browning's love for her gave her a new lease of life, lifted her out of her melancholy and morbid state, and thrilled her whole nature. Within the next few years she was better than she had ever hoped to be. Her son was strong and well, and became a successful painter. He died at Asolo, July 8, 1912. The fact that it turned out well in Browning's case does not argue in favor of marrying a sick woman. But the fact remains that in this one instance, anyway, the marriage was an immeasurable blessing both to her and to him.

But as years went on, her health declined again, with an occasional severe attack which left her weaker. Gradually travel and social life to which she had grown accustomed became harder for her. Rome was chosen for winter quarters on account of its milder climate. Then came her acute and dangerous illness in Rome in the spring of 1861, the slow and anxious journey to Florence, and her last illness in the Casa Guidi. But even in the last days she was not confined to her room except on June 28. And even on the evening of that day, when Miss Isa Blagden left her, Mrs. Browning said she was better. Her sleep that night was broken and troubled. About daybreak, she awoke and told her husband that she thought she felt stronger. Not knowing that it was the end, she expressed her love for him in words that always afterward lived in his memory. He supported her in his arms, and

she grew drowsy and her head fell forward, and she was dead. It was June 29, 1861.

The 15 years of their married life had been exceedingly beautiful, — a unity of soul which is seldom found so nearly complete in this world. There will probably be, in the final reckoning, very few periods of 15 years in any human lives so nearly a perfect union as the married life of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett.

15. With her death Browning was overwhelmed. He could only with the greatest difficulty adjust his mind to life without her. He left Florence that summer and never returned. When he came to London, he could not at first think of keeping house, but finally took the house in Warwick Crescent where he lived for the next 25 years. He made arrangements for the education of his son. He would not surrender to despair, but his desolation was extreme, his life "as grey as the winter sky of London." He shrank from society; it was a year before he could accept invitations as he had done before. By and by, he took what he calls in a letter "a great read at Euripides." He lived in London, but went nearly every summer to France. His father died in 1866, and from that time on Browning and his sister lived together and travelled together. Most of the autumns from 1878 on were spent in Venice. Four autumns Browning and his sister lodged at a quiet inn, the Albergo dell' Universo. But after that they were always guests of Mrs. Arthur Bronson.

16. Beginning early after Mrs. Browning's death and developing with increasing force, was his realization that the power of her spirit was upon him still and that she might "hearken from the realms of help." [1] And so he

[1] Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, Invocation, p. 666, l. 77:

"Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!"

began to weave for her that crown of his maturest and best work, — *The Ring and the Book*, his great Greek pieces (*Balaustion's Adventure* and *Aristophanes' Apology*, with his translation of a tragedy of Euripides contained in each, and then his translation of *The Agamemnon of Æschylus*) — and, beside these, a wealth of short poems, from *Prospice*,[1] written the autumn after her death, to the words,[2]

> "I shall pray: 'Fugitive as precious —
> Minutes which passed, — return, remain!
> Let earth's old life once more enmesh us,
> You with old pleasure, me — old pain,
> So we but meet nor part again!'"

in the volume published on the day he died. Mrs. Browning's face looks out through most of the work he did throughout those 28 years from 1861 to his death. At least, if her face does not look out, you know that it is there, — that there is some benediction anciently her smile.[3]

17. All Browning's early writings were poorly received, but this never shook his devotion to his ideals. It took him more than 30 years to win any considerable amount of appreciation,[4] but he kept on just the same. But as the last third of his life drew on, there began to be an awakening to the fact that a man of colossal intellect and power had been at work all these years. Then came Browning's election as Honorary Fellow of Balliol College and his degrees from Oxford, Cambridge, and Edinburgh, and his nomination for the office of Lord Rector of St. Andrews and then of Glasgow University. We cannot

[1] Pp. 516, 517. [2] P. 1295, ll. 51–55, *Speculative*, in *Asolando*.

[3] *The Ring and the Book*, Invocation, p. 667, l. 4:

> "Some benediction anciently thy smile."

[4] Of course, here and there one liked Browning's writings and recognized his greatness; but such were few for more than 30 years.

cease to be glad that he lived long enough to see some fruit of his toil, to see of the travail of his soul and be, in some measure, satisfied.

18. Mrs. Bronson had a house, built partly on the very wall of Asolo, to which she went to escape the hot weather in Venice. To Asolo, then, on her urgent invitation, came Robert Browning and his sister late in the summer of 1889, on their way to Venice. Here he completed his last volume, which he named *Asolando*.[1] Some of the poems were written here.[2] Then, going to Venice the first of November, Browning had time to read the proofs of the book, and to enjoy his son's home and the city to which he had so often come. There seems to be a singular sense of completeness about it all, as he drew near the end. His last illness was brief, hardly more than two weeks. After an intense and active life of something more than 77 years, he died at ten o'clock on Thursday evening, Dec. 12, 1889, — the very day on which his last volume was published in London. The last day of December that year saw his body laid in the earth under the floor of Westminster Abbey.

[1] The title of the volume Browning explains in the graceful dedication to Mrs. Arthur Bronson, dated Asolo, October 15, 1889. He recalls that Pietro Bembo (made a cardinal in 1539), who had been much in Asolo in the earlier part of his life, is said to have invented a verb, playing upon the name of the town or seeking to find a derivation for it: *Asolare* — "to disport in the open air, amuse one's self at random." On the basis of such a verb, the name of the town, *Asolo*, (1st pers., sing., indic.) would mean "I disport, I amuse myself," and the title *Asolando* would be the gerund, in the dative, "for disporting, for amusing one's self," or more likely the ablative, "by disporting," *i.e.* "by way of disporting" or "by way of amusing one's self at random." The sub-title *Fancies and Facts* indicates the same vein.

[2] See the first sentence in his dedication to Mrs. Bronson. A tablet, placed on the house by the city of Asolo, commemorates Browning's work on *Asolando* there: "In questa casa abito Roberto Browning summo poeta inglese, vi scrisse Asolando, 1889."

Better than any other critic Stopford Brooke has summed up[1] the life of Browning. Only some sentences can be quoted here:

"No fear, no vanity, no complaint of the world, no anger at criticism, no villain fancies disturbed his soul. No laziness, no feebleness in effort injured his work; no desire for money, no faltering of aspiration, no pandering of his gift and genius to please the world, no surrender of art for the sake of fame or filthy lucre, no falseness to his ideal, no base pessimism, no slavery to science, yet no boastful ignorance of its good, no morbid naturalism, no despair of man, no abandonment of the great ideas or disbelief in their mastery, no enfeeblement of reason, no lack of joy and healthy vigor and keen inquiry and passionate interest in humanity. . . . Creative and therefore joyful, receptive and therefore thoughtful, at one with humanity and therefore loving; aspiring to God and believing in God, and therefore steeped to the lips in radiant hope; at one with the past, passionate with the present, and possessing by faith an endless and glorious future — this was a life lived on the top of the wave and moving with its motion from youth to manhood, from manhood to old age. . . . There is no need to mourn for his departure. Nothing feeble has been done, nothing which lowers the note of his life, nothing we can regret as less than his native strength. . . . The sea and sky and mountain glory of the city he loved so well encompassed him with her beauty; and their soft graciousness, their temperate power of joy and life made his departure peaceful. His death added a new fairness to his life. Mankind is fortunate to have so noble a memory, so full and excellent a work, to rest upon and love."

IV. Browning's Published Works

In order to study Browning intelligently, we shall need to bear in mind his chief works as they were published:

1. 1833, *Pauline*, his first published work, — of which

[1] Stopford A. Brooke, in his book *The Poetry of Robert Browning*, last two pages.

we have already spoken sufficiently in our discussion of Browning's life.

2. 1835, *Paracelsus*, a thorough and wonderful philosophical discussion for a boy of 23, on the question: What is the chief end of life — Knowledge or Love?

3. 1837, *Strafford*, a tragedy written at the request of the great actor William C. Macready, and first played by him at Covent Garden Theatre, May 1, 1837.

4. 1840, *Sordello*, a tangled psychological study of the development of a poet's soul.

5. 1841–46, *Bells and Pomegranates*, eight pamphlets. The reason why they came into existence in this shape is interesting: Several pieces of Browning's work — *Pippa Passes*, *King Victor and King Charles*, *The Return of the Druses* — lay in his desk. No publisher would take them. Finally he succeeded in arranging with Edward Moxon to bring them out in pamphlet form, very poor type, very cheap paper, each issue to have only 16 pages, two columns to the page. This series Browning whimsically called *Bells and Pomegranates* (catching the words from Ex. 28: 33, 34; cf. 39: 24–26). And in this pitiful shape appeared the best work of the first half of Browning's life. The eight issues of *Bells and Pomegranates* contained as follows:

No. 1, 1841, *Pippa Passes.*

No. 2, 1842, *King Victor and King Charles.*

No. 3, 1842, *Dramatic Lyrics.*

No. 4, 1843, *The Return of the Druses.*

No. 5, 1843, *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.*

No. 6, 1844, *Colombe's Birthday.*

No. 7, 1845, *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics.*

No. 8, 1846, *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy.*

6. An edition of Browning's collected works, so far, was published in 1849, in two volumes.

7. 1850, *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day,* two religious poems.

8. 1855, *Men and Women,* 2 vols., 51 short poems in all, some of Browning's best.

9. Browning's *Poetical Works* were published in three vols. in 1863.

10. 1864, *Dramatis Personæ*, short poems.

11. Browning's collected *Works* were published in six vols. in 1868.

12. 1868–69, *The Ring and the Book*, 4 vols., one month apart, Nov. and Dec. 1868, Jan. and Feb. 1869.

13. 1871, *Balaustion's Adventure,* which has in it a translation of the *Alkestis* of Euripides.

14. 1871, *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau,* a monologue in the month of the Emperor Napoleon III, discussing his ambitions and his political and social philosophy.

15. 1872, *Fifine at the Fair,* a much more serious and far-reaching analysis of some phases of human nature than some Browning critics have realized.

16. 1873, *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country,* a psychological study founded on facts, *i.e.* on true incidents of a case of dissipation and immorality ("The Mellerio story"). The real names were used at first, but, on legal advice, were changed to fictitious names before publication.

17. 1875, *Aristophanes' Apology,* containing a translation of the *Herakles* of Euripides.

18. 1875, *The Inn Album,* a study of the mind of a woman who still loved the man who wrecked her life.

19. 1876, *Pacchiarotto, and How he Worked in Distemper,* with other short poems. *Pacchiarotto* is an outburst of Browning against his critics.

20. 1877, a translation of *The Agamemnon of Æschylus.*

21. 1878, *La Saisiaz*, a discussion of Immortality, apropos of the sudden death of their friend Miss Anne Egerton Smith who was spending the autumn with Browning and his sister at a villa named La Saisiaz, four or five miles southwest of Geneva, — she died of heart disease on the morning of Sept. 14, 1877.

In the same volume, *The Two Poets of Croisic*, an amusing account, based on historical facts, of how even the most astute literary critics have been fooled.

22. 1879, *Dramatic Idyls*, First Series, short poems.

23. 1880, *Dramatic Idyls*, Second Series.

24. 1883, *Jocoseria*, short poems more or less semi-serious and jesting.

25. 1884, *Ferishtah's Fancies*, bits of philosophy, with lyrics strung between them, some being of great beauty and intensity.

26. 1887, *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day*. They are dead, but Browning calls them up and talks with them.

27. 1889, (dated 1890 on title page, but published Dec., 1889), *Asolando*, short poems, some of them in Browning's very best vein. This volume was published on the day he died, Dec. 12, 1889.

28. *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, in 16 vols., appeared in 1888–89. Browning began making a revision of his poems in the spring of 1888. The edition came out in monthly volumes, completed July, 1889. The poems in his *Asolando* were later included in the 16th vol. of this set, making the whole complete. This is also spoken of as a 17-volume edition, because of having later, in addition to Browning's Works, a 17th volume containing historical notes. In 1894, the 17 volumes were issued also bound in 9 volumes.

It is a vast amount Browning has published, naturally falling into two groups of works: (1) those written before Mrs. Browning's death, and (2) those written after her death, — each with well marked characteristics. Emerson insists that a man's real biography is internal, the story of the development and unfolding of his own mind, and that all outward deeds are secondary. This is certainly true. And you will find the real biography of Robert Browning in his poems. He speaks there by many voices, but you realize after all that he has written down his own soul. These writings, extending over a space of almost 60 years, are one of the richest legacies the nineteenth century has left to the centuries that come after.

V. Some of the Chief Characteristics of Browning's Personality

Browning was a little below medium height, strongly and compactly built, and walked with rapid step. He had bright gray eyes and a ruddy complexion. He talked easily and with vim and clearness.

I look forward to a time when Browning will come into his own, when he will be the favorite poet with men of the world, — business men, engineers, statesmen — men of large affairs. He, of all the poets of the English language, is most of the stripe of the man who is plunged in the world's work. Not one of his portraits looks like the usual notion of a poet. From these portraits, you might judge him to be a prosperous banker, a vigorous member of the House of Commons, a minister of his government to another country, the president of a university, a leading physician, or even the most enthusiastic member of a golf-club. But poet? No. Where is the dreamy eye, the shrinking from the turmoil of the world, the face which tells that the

possessor is devoid of common sense? This face belongs to a keen, logical, genial, practical man of the world.

1. The first and most striking characteristic [1] of Robert Browning is *his full-blooded enjoyment of the crush and struggle of humanity.* He could enjoy, as keenly as Wordsworth, the solitudes of the woods and the sea. But he came back always with renewed zest for, and new interest in, the tangled struggle and tumult of cities, factories, business, politics, and the crowd. It was not to him a meaningless scramble, but he saw in it the working of great principles of good and evil, elemental laws which were to be discovered by their results. He saw in all the strife, in all the intrigue, in all the victory and defeat, in all the sin and shame, — he saw the furnace in which human character is made. Facing the furnace, or rather standing in the furnace himself, he declares: [2]

> "This world's no blot for us
> Nor blank; it means intensely and means good:
> To find its meaning is my meat and drink."

The struggle and tumult of the world, its suffering and its sin, instead of repelling him, attracted him, and he rejoiced in it "as a strong man to run a race," or as in the old iron days a soldier exulted in the hour of battle, though it was "with confused noise and garments rolled in blood."

2. This resulted naturally from and was linked with Browning's second great characteristic, — *his universal sympathy.* Everything human was full of interest for him. The more broken and pitiful, the more it attracted

[1] The characteristics here given are, of course, drawn from Browning's actions and writings — chiefly from his writings — not from his face, as one who heard this lecture supposed, because his portraits had been mentioned. No wonder that this listener said: "I can't see all that in his face."

[2] P. 450, ll. 41–43, *Fra Lippo Lippi.*

him. Himself a man of stainless character, he never drew back with "I am holier than thou." I know no one who mingles justice and mercy so well in his attitude toward all sorts of sin and shame, except Jesus of Nazareth from whom Browning learned the way to do it. He shrinks never from the high and mighty. They also are but men. To Browning, human personalities are what they are, without regard to outward seeming, and must stand only on their own intrinsic worth. He lived for absolute values, not compromise nor expediency. And he estimates other personalities by these same absolute values. His sympathy is more discerning and more universal than Shakespeare's; for Shakespeare despised the crowd of the common people, and never touches them except in ridicule. Browning loved the common people, the struggling masses, as well as he loved the great and cultured. A single example will suffice: a factory-girl from the silk mills of Asolo by her unconscious influence transforms the life and shapes the destiny of the rich and mighty, as she passes singing on her one holiday in the year. I refer, of course, to Pippa.

3. A third prominent characteristic is *Browning's impatience with mediocrity and his contempt for indecision, irresolution, half-hearted endeavor, and fear.* No one can read Browning's poems without feeling his intense virility. He is so full of red blood himself that the pale-blooded, white-livered, and passionless folks he cannot endure. With him, the programme of life is: *decide*, then *act*. He is fond of rich colors and extreme situations. Porphyria's lover who strangles her with her long string of yellow hair that he may keep her just as she is, because he loves her so, would appeal to few poets as he does to the intense mind of Robert Browning. If Wordsworth is the poet of the commonplace things of life, Browning is the poet

of human nature wrought up to its uttermost. Browning, a man of unfaltering courage himself, wanted courage in others. He wants Caponsacchi to thank God for temptation.[1] How else grow strong, except by resistance and overcoming?

> "Why comes temptation but for man to meet
> And master and make crouch beneath his foot?"[1]

Pray not only "Lead us not into temptation" — Browning does not stop there:

> "Yea, but, O Thou whose servants are the bold,
> Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
> Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
> That so he may do battle and have praise!"[1]

Just like Robert Browning to look for men so strong in ideals and inner strength that temptations would be afraid of them.

Everywhere what he wants is no dallying, but decision, action. This has led some purblind critics to imagine that Browning approved of sin, just as some critics have supposed that Jesus approved of dishonesty because he "commended the unjust steward" in the parable:[2] it was only the steward's long-headedness and shrewdness which Jesus commended, not the acts by which he showed it. So Browning distinguishes the quality of soul shown in certain acts from the moral quality of those acts themselves. The most familiar stumbling-stone is *The Statue and the Bust*, in which a man and woman plan an elope-

[1] The Pope, in *The Ring and the Book*, p. 854, ll. 51–60. Robert Louis Stevenson ("*Virginibus Puerisque*" *and Other Papers*, London, 1881, p. 43; Medallion Edition, New York, 1900, p. 37) calls this "the noblest passage in one of the noblest books of this century," — *i.e.* now, of course, the century that lately closed.

[2] Luke 16: 1–8.

ment, an adulterous affair, and cherish the plan for years, but never have the courage to carry it out. And Browning condemns them for their failure. It is not that he approves their sinful scheme, but he feels that it was a thing to test their mettle just as much as a better thing would. He has stated this so plainly at the end that I marvel that anyone could miss it:[1]

> "I hear you reproach, 'But delay was best
> For their end was a crime.' — Oh, a crime will do
> As well, I reply, to serve for a test,
> As a virtue golden through and through."
>
> "Let a man contend to the uttermost
> For his life's set prize, be it what it will!"

This uncompromising view of human life runs through all Browning's works. When we once grasp it, we see the reason often for his choice of subject and manner of treatment. The kind of men Browning admires are men of splendid intensity and the courage to follow their convictions, — Luria, who kills himself in stainless honor rather than submit even to being treated with suspicion; Ivan Ivanovitch, who takes instantly into his own hands the execution of the woman who has saved her own life by the unnatural act of letting the wolves have her children; Herakles, who meets all hardship and all sorrow with a victorious smile and holds "his life out on his hand, for any man to take,"[2]

> "As up he stepped, pursuing duty still
> 'Higher and harder,' as he laughed and said."[2]

Browning feels, as keenly as any man can, "the old woe o' the world" and the pitifulness of the fact that "nothing endures," that "nothing can be as it has been before."

[1] P. 375, ll. 1–4, 17, 18.

[2] *Balaustion's Adventure*, p. 554, ll. 47, 48; p. 556, ll. 74–76.

But he has no idea that this should paralyze our efforts. The unstable quality of life, its constant changefulness, over which so many poets mourn, provokes exultation from Robert Browning:[1]

> "Rejoice that man is hurled
> From change to change unceasingly,
> His soul's wings never furled!"

To Robert Browning, the great men of the world are those who have sternly obeyed God's stern command (so stern that it "clangs"), no matter what the consequences and no matter how soon these men were to be cut off, — that was not their affair — the main point is that they were in the process of the doing, when they were cut off. As "the famous ones of old" throng his imagination, he hears them say:[2]

> "Each of us heard clang God's 'Come!' and each was coming."

4. A fourth very striking characteristic is Browning's *keenness of analysis*. In his examination of human actions, in his search for motives, he is a real psychologist who makes the technical psychology of the schools look poor and artificial. His psychology is pulsing with life and reckons all the tangled lines of hereditary tendency, fresh incentive, fear, hope, passion, which issue in a single act. Among all its scientific men, the nineteenth century did not produce a keener psychologist than Robert Browning. But because his psychological studies were published in the form of live poetry, instead of dry scientific discussions, the scientists did not discover what he had done until many years after he had done it. It is a simple fact that

[1] See *James Lee's Wife*, VI, especially stanzas XI–XVI (pp. 489, 490). The three lines quoted are from p. 490, ll. 8–10.

[2] *Epilogue* to *Ferishtah's Fancies*, p. 1240, l. 38.

he preceded by 20 years the psychological analysis which the scientists finally arrived at, and then they discovered that he had done it better 20 years before. One of the chief reasons why he was so long in meeting with any appreciation is that he was 20 years ahead of the scientific movement of the century. We can have very little patience with this writing of the history of philosophy which reckons only those works that are written in prose and labelled "philosophical dissertations" and ignores the acuter philosophical studies of Goethe, Shakespeare, and many others, simply because they are written more vividly and in metrical form. When the history of psychology shall some time be really written, it will have to take into consideration, not only the technical psychology of the universities, but the work of such men as Robert Browning.

5. And his *comprehensiveness* is the fifth characteristic. Involved in minute analysis as he was, he never lost sight of things in the large, which the scientific analyst almost always does. Browning kept clearly in mind the relation of these minute details to a great whole — he realized that no smallest thing can be isolated, but rather is indissolubly linked with universal laws. And so the sweep of Browning's philosophy is as deep as human life and as wide as the universe to which our human life is everywhere related. There is hardly a phase of life but what Browning has sooner or later reckoned with it and its relations. There is hardly a problem of existence but what Browning has struggled with it, either in his own experience or in imagination. For he had that unusual power of putting himself in another's place and meeting the situation in his imagination almost as keenly as if it were his own life. As a great thinker and as a great philosopher, Browning will hold a first rank, when he comes to be estimated as he is. The

fact is not strange, but a perfectly natural thing, that, when there was no course in Browning given in the English Department of Oberlin College, President King (then a professor — it was before he was made President) gave some study of Browning in the Department of Philosophy.

6. A sixth characteristic is Browning's *faith*. He wanted it to be said of him that at least he "believed in Soul, was very sure of God."[1] The nineteenth century produced many great Christians, but Robert Browning was one of the greatest Christians of them all. At any rate, that is what his own writings show, whatever statements may be made to the contrary.[2] Digging about the roots and questioning the fundamentals of the Christian Religion, he believed more and more in its essence. A man of universal charity toward all forms of religion, his own religious faith as we find it in his poems is singularly simple and beautiful. The proposition made some time ago by the Rev. Dr. John W. Bradshaw,[3] that a course in Browning should be given in theological seminaries, is natural and ought to be carried out. Show me a theological writer who will give young men a vital grip on real religion and a vital message for humanity, equal to that of Robert Browning.

7. And this leads naturally to a seventh characteristic — Browning's *optimism*. We hear much about this, but few realize how deep and far-reaching Browning's optimism is. It is not the optimism of a child, who is optimistic because he knows nothing of life, nor the optimism of that great class who are optimistic because they are comfortable

[1] Near the end of *La Saisiaz*, p. 1132, l. 23.

[2] Cf. discussion of Browning's religious belief in the last chapter of Griffin and Minchin's *Life of Browning*, pp. 204–208.

[3] Dr. Bradshaw was then Pastor of the First Congregational Church of Oberlin. He died in Peoria, Ill., Sept. 2, 1912.

and prosperous and have a good digestion. Browning's is the optimism of a man who knows the worst there is in the world, has probed it to the bottom, and feels to the uttermost the cruelty and the tragedy of life, but who, in spite of all this, believes that God will not be defeated, but that good will triumph at the last. It is the optimism of a man whose eyes are open, who sees the disease and sin and putrefaction of humanity, but is not blind to the forces that make for righteousness, not blind to the reality of some altruism and self-sacrifice already achieved in the history of the world, some nobility of character, some victory of the soul. And these facts, linked with his faith in the Infinite Father, give him the foundations for his hope. Such a man's optimism may well reassure you and me, when we are bewildered and overwhelmed by the evil of the world.

Andrew Lang prefixed to the Butcher-Lang translation (1879) of Homer's Odyssey a sonnet, in which he says that, just

> "As one who for a weary space has lain
> Lulled by the song of Circe and her wine"

would, when he escaped, be

> "glad to know the brine
> Salt on his lips, and the large air again, —"

"So," he says,

> "gladly from the songs of modern speech
> Men turn, and see the stars and feel the free
> Shrill wind,"

and

> "Hear like ocean on a western beach
> The surge and thunder of the Odyssey."

It has seemed to me so strikingly like the way we turn to Robert Browning. Out of the clamor of many voices

crying "Lo! here" and "Lo! there," out of the pettiness and sentimentalism of those who are writing in our day for a living, out of the cramping and dwarfing clutch of business, out of the arrogant claims of science, out of the specializing in our universities which is fast depriving men of any liberal education, — out of all that is partial and narrow and feeble, we turn to the greatness and serenity and universality and victoriousness of Robert Browning's soul, —

"One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake." [1]

This brings us to the last main head of our present discussion:

VI. The Influences which made Robert Browning what he was

These influences are not far to seek:

1. *His heredity.* On this we have already dwelt in speaking of his father and mother. He had from his parents a good constitution, and from his father especially an exuberant vitality. I have grown more and more to realize, as I look at the world, that sheer vitality is the most needful thing, the greatest source of efficiency, — indispensable to highest success. In a higher stage of civilization, the first essential of education will be the cultivation of physical vitality, and that is a work of more than one generation. Browning's splendid health is what made it possible for him to do the immense amount of

[1] *Epilogue* to *Asolando*, p. 1317, ll. 83–87.

intellectual work which he did, and it was this same health which made life so real to him. The fact is that some people actually *live more* than others do in the same length of time — I know of no other way to describe it, — they have more life in their bodies, life more intense and of a higher potential. Browning had that *plus* condition of energy which, as Emerson teaches, is essential to power. He was, however, of a high-strung nervous temperament, which led him occasionally into outbursts of anger. And his intensity of feeling would have burned him out in early life, if it had not been for the constitution and vitality behind it. From his father, Browning had also great intellectual ability and the artistic instinct. From his mother, again, tenderness, musical taste, reverence, a tendency to mysticism, and yet with this a strain of the German philosophic mind. Such currents combining in Robert Browning gave him a richly endowed personality, unusually versatile and comprehensive.

2. *His education.* His was a real education: *educere*, to lead out; *educate*, to lead out, to develop, the mind of the man. The process of his education stands out in sharp contrast to the dreary artificial mechanism commonly employed and which is too often a system of stuffing, instead of drawing out and developing. Many very thoughtful men have serious misgivings about college education in our day, — each teacher bestirring himself to stuff the students' heads, and the students being mindful chiefly of the possibility of delivering some of the same material again in examination. A college education ought to be of great value to a man, and will be, if he gets from it high purposes, an enlarged area of consciousness, and a discipline of mind which will enable him to master any department of life upon which he may concentrate his

attention. But probably a majority of the students graduate from our colleges without knowing either how to study or how to think. If a man knows how to study and how to think, he can educate himself. The best the college can do for a man is to start him on his self-education. And the serious question is whether the colleges are really accomplishing this. Certain it is that many of the world's greatest minds were self-educated without the college experience. You will see in Stratford-on-Avon the grammar-school where William Shakespeare went to school; it is still used. But he never got any further. His real education was given him by himself, — a few old history books in English translation, a lot of current novels, the streets of London, the audience at the Globe Theatre, and the inner recesses of his own soul, — and the wisest men for 300 years have been trying to stretch their minds to the largeness of Shakespeare's grasp of man's life and the universe. Sir William Herschel, the great astronomer, had a musical education, but instructed himself in mathematics and astronomy, and taught himself to build a telescope and discovered a new planet. Professor Thomas Henry Huxley, one of the most celebrated biologists of the nineteenth century, had a start in the lower schools and then in the hospitals, but chiefly taught the science of biology to himself and then taught it in the universities. Herbert Spencer never had a college education nor had anything to do with the colleges; yet it has been claimed for him that he came nearer to covering the whole field of human knowledge than any man in his day. So with others by the score. Similarly in Robert Browning you have a man largely self-educated by books and travel, a man whose education makes the product of our universities look ignorant. He had, at most, less than two terms in London

University. Yet he reads Greek and Latin at sight for fun, speaks French and Italian and I know not how many other languages besides English, and reads Hebrew. He is, by all odds, the most widely educated man who has written English poetry. See his Greek pieces, *Balaustion's Adventure* and *Aristophanes' Apology*, a perfect maze of intimate knowledge of the classics. See his information as to history, science, philosophy, art, music, — all marvellously accurate. To read Robert Browning intelligently is a sort of university education in itself. One can hardly be surprised that hard-headed men of affairs have very little respect for the fact that a young man has completed a college education, with its separation from the real world, its artificial methods, and its refusal, in the majority of departments, to see things in the large. Higher education has to begin with the developing of certain qualities of mind. And Socrates talking with the young men in the streets of Athens was, in a sense, engaged in higher education. And Robert Browning on his horse, or with the fencing foils, or at his music, or studying with his tutors, or deep in the books of his father's library or the British Museum, or travelling on the Continent, was, all together, laying the foundations of a better education than any university in the world could give him.

3. *The power of Elizabeth Barrett, his wife.* The influence of personalities is the largest influence in our lives. I need not speak in detail of other personal influences in Browning's life — *e.g.* Shelley's which belongs to the domain of books, Macready's which belongs to the domain of opportunity — but turn at once to the supreme personal influence, that of Mrs. Browning. In his relation to her, he had both of the things which add most to human life,

viz. love and suffering. (*a*) It is useless to argue as to why love enriches and deepens the lives of men and women so much. The fact is that it does. No man need hope ever to be a great artist, a great musician, a great poet, unless he loves greatly. Somehow, that is what stirs the foundations of life, and opens the vistas of the mysteries of the universe. It is literally true that he lives most who loves most. Somewhere in the mystery of human existence, it is probably a fact that love and life are one, and make humanity kindred of the Infinite. (*b*) And if to love be added the bitterness of bereavement, you have the most that can be done for a human personality. It is useless to ask why it is that suffering so deepens our lives and so develops the soul. The fact is that it does. As long as we are comfortable and content, there is no hope of our knowing much about life. But when we are trodden down by the victorious feet of pain and death, then we begin to care for something besides material things, and think of things unseen and eternal. Some portion of such suffering must come to everyone, — to some more than to others. And life is never the same again. There remains nothing but to endure, to think it through, and to reconstruct once more our conception of human life and the universe.

The richest influence in Robert Browning's life was Elizabeth Barrett. His deep reverence for all womanhood became centred upon her. His splendid capacity for loving became utterly devoted to his passionate love for her. Fifteen years of such married life gave him the closest intellectual fellowship. And the loss of her heightened and emphasized the power of her life over him, beyond what would have been possible if she had lived. No doubt he idealized her. She was only a frail woman in a world

of mystery, like all humanity, but to him she was the soul of his soul.[1]

She lies buried in the quiet cemetery at Florence. He lies under the feet of the tourists and sightseers who throng Westminster Abbey, — a constant stream of the light, the flippant, and the vain. So much vitality, such keenness for life, such zest in living as Robert Browning had — such love and devotion as Elizabeth Barrett bore toward him — has it all come to dust and ashes? Somehow, it is not easy to think of them as dead. If they are dead, then all the world is an "insubstantial pageant" and may as well dissolve; for there will be none more fit for immortality than Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett. But what if they are not dead? What if their passionate intensity of living has its fulfillment otherwhere? What if, as Robert Browning himself confidently expected, they have found

> "the finite love
> Blent and embalmed with the eternal life."[2]

[1] *Prospice*, p. 517, l. 25:

> "O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again."

[2] The Pope, in *The Ring and the Book*, p. 862, ll. 17, 18.

II

INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED): BROWNING AS A LITERARY ARTIST

WE turn now to an examination of the Literary Art of Browning.

I. DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF UNDERSTANDING BROWNING

We hear a great deal about the difficulties in understanding Browning. I am sure the obscurity of Browning's writing has been greatly exaggerated, but we may as well discuss at the beginning the real difficulties which the reader of Browning at first meets. These difficulties arise out of five things:

1. The first difficulty which a reader of Browning meets is *the vast amount Browning has written and its very unequal quality*. As we saw, in running over the dates of his published volumes, he has been very industrious from the age of 20 to the age of 77 and has produced an immense amount.[1] The reader hardly knows where to begin and has no idea when he will get through. (*a*) This matter which Browning has published has immense variety. (*b*) Its quality covers wide range, — from the very highest point of poetic imagination to some of the dullest and

[1] It is interesting to notice the distribution of the matter produced — the large amount published in the 12 or 13 years preceding Browning's marriage, the small amount during his married life, and the great amount after Mrs. Browning's death. Cf. the dates of the volumes to see this.

prosiest matter ever strung out in metrical form. (*c*) Therefore, the fate of the reader is often decided by where he begins on Browning. If I may give an illustration: A business man in Cincinnati had heard me say that Browning was the poet for men of affairs, and he made up his mind to try Browning. But next time I saw him he said: "I thought you said Browning was good reading. I couldn't make much out of it." I asked: "What did you read?" He answered: "That *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*." "Well," I said, "if I told you there was fine scenery in the state of Colorado, and you began in some swamp in a corner of the state and saw only that, could you say you had given Colorado scenery a fair chance?" No doubt, this gentleman's experience illustrates that of many. (*d*) Like so many poets (Wordsworth is a striking example), Browning would have fared better, if he had written less. If he had written less, or at least had published less, and that had been his best, he would have met with more success. Browning is more responsible than anyone else for the feeling against him. He has done much to defeat himself, because he could not form a just critical estimate of what he had written, and so failed to suppress a large number of poems, good as exercises in philosophy and composition but not such as the public has patience to wrestle with. (*e*) But this has inevitably come about from Browning's indifference as to whether the public approved of him or not. We ought not to say indifference, because he did care and once in a while breaks out in indignation against his treatment at the hands of the critics. But he was a poet for poetry's sake, and the attitude of his readers toward him was a secondary matter. The public gave him a cold shoulder from the start. He went on calmly and persistently, and knowing that the

public were giving no better reception to his best productions than to his worst, he had no standard of public approval or disapproval to judge by, and so published everything which had been born in his own thoughts and had gotten itself written down in poetic form. Meantime, he bore the public no ill feeling and greets them with the jovial words,

> "Such, British Public, ye who like me not,
> (God love you !) —" [1]

and in another place,

> "So, British Public, who may like me yet,
> (Marry and amen !)" [2]

But it is a fact that Browning published too much and of too unequal worth. This is a real difficulty for the beginner.

2. A second difficulty is *the colloquial nature of his writing.* Browning is at once more informal and colloquial in style than any of the English poets of first rank. The result is that often what we would understand without hesitation if spoken by a friend we find difficult to understand when we see it on the printed page. (*a*) With the spoken words, the meaning is made evident by emphasis and inflection. But in type, there is no help except in punctuation. Consequently the punctuation of Browning's poems is a matter of extreme difficulty. There is a good story of one occasion when Browning was calling on Thomas Carlyle. And Carlyle was shaving, or something of the sort, and kept his caller waiting a long time. When at last he came in straightening his collar and tie, he said in his gruff way: "Well, Browning, you've taught the English people one

[1] *The Ring and the Book*, p. 606, ll. 54, 55. Notice the rest of the sentence.

[2] *The Ring and the Book*, p. 906, ll 44, 45. The rest of the sentence is good too.

thing anyway — you've taught them the value of punctuation." (*b*) The colloquial nature of Browning's writing results often in the omission of conjunctions. In conversation we say: "Our hope is we shall find a boat," — but how to punctuate that little sentence when it is set up? So we take refuge in printing it in the stilted form: "Our hope is that we shall find a boat." (*c*) More noticeable is the fact that the colloquial style results in the omission of the relative pronoun. We say, "The man I met on the street was John Smith," and it goes all right. But when we write it, it looks queer and we make it read: "The man whom I met on the street." Browning didn't care how it looked; he wrote it down as he would speak it. Consequently, relative pronouns are omitted ruthlessly. I venture to estimate that a large per cent of the difficulty which one has at first with Browning's sentences grows out of the omission of the relative pronoun. There is one solvent which will make plain two-thirds of such cases: Inasmuch as the style is extremely colloquial, read the passage out loud, in a natural conversational way, and you will be surprised to find that what was thick as mud on the printed page is plain and easy when conveyed by the living voice. There is no poet whose writings insist upon being read out loud to be understood, to such an extent as Browning's do.

3. A third source of difficulty in Browning is *the frequent long sentences, of loose structure*, with a large number of subordinate clauses, sometimes with a considerable amount of parenthetical matter, sometimes even with changes of construction, — and always with a picturesque accumulation of all sorts of punctuation marks. Browning can write marvellous short sentences, and has written a host of them. But he has written also a host of long ones

which bear a striking resemblance to the old-fashioned German sentence which is now losing its hold on German authors and lecturers. In dealing with a long sentence of Browning's there is no rule, except to keep a level head, bear in mind what is the chief point he is talking about, and mark the subordinate relation of other parts of the sentence. One presently becomes accustomed to Browning's long sentences and finds little difficulty in them.

4. The fourth source of difficulty is more serious: It is Browning's *vast learning.*

a. Browning is surely the most learned man who ever wrote English verse. That position has been sometimes accorded to John Milton, but you will find Browning's erudition greater than Milton's. Browning's knowledge of the classics is as wide and as minute as Milton's, and he has a vast knowledge of art and mediæval lore which Milton lacks. Browning's knowledge is various and curious, and reaches into a large number of subjects which Milton never touched. I have no fears that Browning's right to the position as the most learned English poet can be challenged.

b. But the trouble is: Browning overestimates his reader's learning. He proceeds upon the assumption that his reader is as familiar with all this varied information as he himself is. Probably Browning never thought anything about it, but simply goes ahead, disregards the reader, and puts down what is plain to Browning and would be, he supposes, plain to anyone. But alas! we are not Browning; our education has been in the narrow channel of American schools and colleges, and Robert Browning has the better of us. Consequently, what is a matter of course to him has to be dug out by us, with searching.

c. This everyday familiarity which Browning has with a wide range of learning is the reason why his allusions are sometimes so obscure. A few illustrations out of hundreds:

(1) He is very fond of the Latin poet Horace, — quotes him and alludes to him often, but is more likely to call him *Flaccus*[1] than Horace. Who of us, unless one just out of the Latin class, remembers that that poet's name is Quintus Horatius Flaccus, or knows who Flaccus is?

(2) An obscure artist, whose "name and fame" Browning himself says "none of you know," is spoken of as "the imaginative Sienese great in the scenic backgrounds."[2] Fortunately in his second reference[3] to this "etcher of those prints," he gives the man's name, Ademollo.

(3) The *Summa Theologiæ* of St. Thomas Aquinas is mentioned familiarly as the "Summa."[4] That work is the standard of theology in the Roman Catholic Church, but who, except the Latin clergy and those outside of that communion who make a special study of theology, would know what book is meant?

(4) Browning puts into the mouth of Count Guido's brother the line:

> "There's a *sors*, there's a right Virgilian dip!"[5]

How many who read Virgil in high school or college ever know that it was once a custom to dip into Virgil at random for guidance, just as some very pious people nowadays open their Bible believing that they will be directed to the verse that will make plain to them what to do?

[1] *e.g.* p. 803, l. 13; p. 824, l. 56; p. 826, l. 11.
[2] P. 650, ll. 42–48, especially ll. 46–48.
[3] P. 654, ll. 37–40.
[4] *e.g.* p. 743, l. 65; p. 758, ll. 50, 66.
[5] P. 731, l. 70.

(5) Again, we read:

> "All
> Glories that met upon the tragic stage
> When the Third Poet's tread surprised the Two."[1]

To whom does this refer? "The Two" are Æschylus and Sophocles. "The Third Poet" is Euripides.

(6) A point is made[2] of the Jewish scribe's treatment of the ineffable name[3] of the God of the Hebrews, when he came to it in his reading in the synagogue. Who, except Old Testament students, knows that the scribe was not allowed to pronounce the name, but substituted for it another word — *Adonai*, Lord?

And so on in hundreds of cases with no effort to make the allusion clear. The illustrations we have chosen are simpler than many others and take less time to explain. Browning often writes with a perfect tangle of allusions to mythology, history, literature, and science. We do not mean to imply that the majority of such allusions are obscure, but unfortunately, to most of us, many of them are.

d. Browning's knowledge of the history of painting makes him sometimes write so that hardly any but those who have been educated specially in that line can get the full benefit of the poem, *e.g. Old Pictures in Florence*. One must have something of Browning's own artistic instinct to appreciate fully such interpretations of artists' struggles and ideals as he has given in *Pictor Ignotus*,

[1] P. 860, ll. 65–67.

[2] P. 755, l. 83–p. 756, l. 9.

[3] The consonants of the name are known — JHVH, or YHWH, according to what scheme of transliteration you adopt, — pronounced probably Yahweh, certainly *not* Jehovah, which is a word no ancient Hebrew ever heard of; that word was invented about the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century A.D.

Fra Lippo Lippi, and *Andrea del Sarto*, or to realize how fine a thing is a little poem like that one called *A Face*.

e. Browning is so thoroughly at home in music that one needs a course in that subject to comprehend fully his frequent references to it[1] and similes drawn from it, or to get the full force of such poems as *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, *Master Hughes of Saxe-Gotha*, *Abt Vogler*, or his parleying *With Charles Avison*, the great organist.

f. Browning's knowledge of so many languages creates a difficulty for us who have so few languages at command. It is not that Browning likes to parade them, but he very naturally flings in phrases from other languages familiar to him, especially if they give atmosphere and local color. So the reader of Browning must be prepared for Greek — we need Greek even in reading his translations from Greek into English, they keep the Greek idiom so much — Latin in abundance, plenty of French of course, some German (not many German words used), and in all poems laid in Italy a great number of Italian expressions. Browning is fond of Hebrew and Aramaic, and in two poems, *The Melon-Seller* and *Two Camels*, he has had the audacity to put the Hebrew expressions in the Hebrew characters.[2] Usually a writer, if he quotes Hebrew words for the general reader, transliterates into the Roman alphabet; so few, except those who study the Old Testament in the original or read rabbinic writings, or are familiar with Yiddish, can be supposed to read the Hebrew characters.

[1] *e.g.* in *Fifine at the Fair*, p. 944, ll. 19–24.

[2] P. 1219, ll. 2, 3; p. 1229, l. 28, — see also the Hebrew word in l. 34. Cf. Browning's note in connection with another poem, p. 1214, where he quotes the title of a rabbinic treatise and also a proverb, both in Hebrew letters. Browning writes only the consonants, which is the more general usage. The vowel-points when written are placed under the consonants. Hebrew reads from right to left.

g. It is Browning's wide and varied learning and his great number of interests that makes his style diffuse. Browning lacks critical judgment. He does not know how to reject. His mind is so well stored that, when he starts to write, his head is full of similes, metaphors, analogies, associations, suggested trains of thought. All of these are more or less related to the subject in hand, and a good critical judgment would dictate which should be kept and which rejected. But as they crowd upon Browning, he puts them all down on paper. The result is often distracting and confusing. He would have gained much if he had left out much. The poems are often too long, twice as long as need be — twice as long as they would be, if he had left out the more irrelevant parts. Browning himself does not lose the connection of thought, but the reader often does. Often one might drop out a page, two pages, three pages, — and the next line joins right on and goes on just as if nothing had happened. It was only one of those little excursions of Browning's into a field which was suggested at that point by something he was saying. Browning is constantly under the temptation to wander off into philosophizing — excellent philosophizing it often is, but aside from his story. He enjoys searching out motives and seeing how small acts are related to the universe. He has great intellectual keenness in doing this. But the story has to wait, and the general style of the whole is often made too discursive. It is true that, as one grows familiar with Browning's poems, this easy meandering style grows to have a certain pleasure in it, but it is often confusing for the reader at first.

5. A fifth source of difficulty is *the monologue form* in which so many of the poems are cast. It is true that Browning has narratives told in the third person, also that

he has a large amount written in dialogue form. But all his best poems are in monologue, *i.e.* he speaks through the mouth of the man or woman whose deeds or thoughts are being told and the narrative is, therefore, in the first person. I remember that this seemed queer to me at first, — so many voices telling, in their own person, their adventures and their thoughts. Yet, as soon as you get accustomed to it, this form of presentation does not even attract your attention. The narrative in the first person is far more vivid than any in the third person can be. Browning is not a successful dramatist, but he is the most successful writer of monologues. What Shakespeare has done for the drama Browning has done for the monologue, — has brought it to the highest point it has reached in English Literature.

The difficulties in reading Browning, though usually exaggerated, are real: The vast amount and unequal quality of Browning's work, the colloquial nature of his style, the frequent long and involved sentences, his own great learning and overestimate of the reader's learning, and the monologue form in which many of the poems are cast.

II. Excellences in Browning as a Literary Artist

I have grown more and more doubtful about all the statements usually made about Browning's literary ability. Nothing is more full of superstitions than the world of literary criticism. Some man succeeds in getting before the public a number of statements in regard to an author and these become accepted, and then are repeated *ad infinitum* by those who come after, because it is easier to do that than to read the author and see for one's self. Thus there become settled literary superstitions, — that such and such an author has such and such failings and

only such and such points in his favor. It is the old trick of the average critic — he has not read the book. Sometimes when a man looks for himself, he is surprised. The usual estimate of Browning's skill is simply one of the ruts of criticism. Has it occurred to you that it may be partly due to the fact that the critics who first established it may not have been widely enough acquainted with Literature and so condemned as inartistic what was simply unfamiliar to them?[1] Not long ago, in studying for another course without regard to Browning, it fell to me to go through a good number of books on English metre. And I found, in books written from different standpoints and following different methods of inquiry, that, when it came to discussing rare and difficult metres, often metres imported from other languages, they frequently had to cite Robert Browning for examples.[2] It is quite probable that Browning's literary reputation has suffered because many of his metres are unfamiliar. But we must say that it is not fair to suppose a man unskilled and lawless, when he is working often in metres too difficult for most poets to use. Anyway, I have come more and more to doubt the sweeping statements made in many books and periodicals, about the literary skill shown in Browning's poems. There are a few points of excellence in Browning from the standpoint of his craftsmanship in English poetry, and these I would like to mention now.

[1] Cf. the musical critics' treatment of Richard Wagner when his operas first appeared.

[2] *e.g.* F. B. Gummere, *A Handbook of Poetics*, Boston, 1898, pp. 203, 207, 209; T. S. Omond, *A Study of Metre*, London, 1903, p. 64; J. B. Mayor, *A Handbook of Modern English Metre*, Cambridge, 1903, pp. 27, 81, 142, 145. For a thorough discussion of Browning's metres, see Geo. Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody*, London, 1906–10, vol. III, pp. 216–240; cf. pp. 296–301, especially pp. 299, 300.

1. *His choice of words.* I don't know anyone in English Literature who chooses words that give so much in one word as Robert Browning does, — a whole picture in one word. It seems unnecessary to point out single examples. It is his habit when writing at his best. But I will cite a few instances out of hundreds. The *Italics* in the illustrations are our own, to call attention to the words under discussion.

a. In the poem entitled *By the Fire-side*, the man who speaks the lines imagines what he will do when he gets to be old — he will sit there by the fire "deep in Greek" — but his mind will run away from the Greek up into the Apennines, back to that day with the sweetheart of his youth. Then he gives us details of the picture in which every stanza is a work of art. But we pause at the first two lines of stanza VIII:[1]

> "A turn, and we stand in the heart of things;
> The woods are round us, *heaped* and dim."

Anyone who has been in the Alps or Apennines knows how accurately these words tell the tale. In a tramp of six weeks in the higher valleys of Switzerland, not less than a hundred times where valleys narrowed down these words came and no others would cover it — mountains on every side — "we stand in the heart of things" — "woods heaped and dim." Nothing but that word *heaped* could describe the woods on the steep slopes and spurs and knolls — *heaped*, that's how they look.

b. The poem "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*" was written in one day and not afterward revised. It has some stanzas that are not poetry at all and some that are of the most consummate poetry to be found. The

[1] P. 246, ll. 1, 2.

knight, Sir Roland, walks across the dreariest plain which imagination can devise and is surprised by coming upon "a sudden little river." Notice this part of the description of the stream:[1]

"All along,
Low scrubby alders *kneeled down* over it."

Have you ever heard any expression which could convey that picture like the words "*kneeled down* over it"? You have seen it — you know how a brook cuts across a level pasture or meadow, and the steep banks are three or four feet high, and how the alders grow out from the bank near the water-line and then bend sharply to grow upright. How often we have noticed that bend in the stock of the bush, six or eight inches from where it comes out of the ground, almost exactly like the crook of a knee, — so that, glancing at it from the side, not bothering our minds as to how it came to be so, we see the alder *kneel down* over the water.

c. In the same poem, stanza XXX, when at last suddenly the knight realizes that he has reached the place he has been years searching for:[2]

"*Burningly* it came on me all at once,
This was the place!"

"*Burningly* it came" — Any of us who have noticed what comes with a sudden realization of something that concerns us deeply — the flush of heat which goes over the whole body, often making one break out in a perspiration even in a cold day — will know that all that is told, sharply and conclusively, in

"*Burningly* it came on me all at once."

[1] P. 377, ll 34, 35, in stanza XX.

[2] P. 378, ll. 25, 26.

d. Or take the line from *In a Balcony:* [1]

"As yonder mists *curdling* before the moon."

Could any other word create in the mind the picture created by that word *curdling?* We have all seen the thing, but I doubt if any man in literature has described it so accurately as Browning has in the words

"yonder mists *curdling* before the moon."

e. This facility in using the most expressive word or phrase to convey the picture vividly is one of the commonest things in Browning's writing, and the expression is so apt that, once you get it in mind, the thing itself always calls up Browning's words.

(1) How many times every autumn a day comes that brings to my mind the lines from poem VII of *James Lee's Wife:* [2]

"Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning!"

(2) How often on days when the breeze pours over the hills and plains have the words come, from Browning's *Two in the Campagna:* [3]

"An everlasting wash of air."

(3) By the seaside, over and over again come the lines from *Balaustion's Adventure:* [4]

"Beside
The sea, which somehow tempts the life in us
To come trip over its white waste of waves,
And try escape from earth, and fleet as free."

[1] P. 481, l. 78. [2] P. 490, ll. 21, 22. [3] P. 251, l. 9.
[4] P. 574, ll. 1–4. In line 4, "and fleet as free," *i.e.* as free as the foam itself.

Most of us feel the drawing of the sea, but I do not know where to find anything that gets at the very essence of it as Browning does when he writes that the sea "*somehow tempts the life in us.*"

(4) Or take a summer day with keen breeze and unusually clear air, and dark blue sky with only now and then some deep fragment of white cloud voyaging across it, and the words of the same Greek girl in *Aristophanes' Apology* will haunt your memory:[1]

> "Greed and strife,
> Hatred and cark and care, what place have they
> In yon blue liberality of heaven?"

You will go far before you find words that tell what you're looking at on such a day, as do the words "*yon blue liberality of heaven.*"

But an unusual skill in the choice of words is really a habit with Robert Browning. So we need not dwell on it any more.

2. *His wealth of diction.* Of this only a few observations:

a. Browning's vocabulary is astonishingly large and varied. I don't believe it is exceeded by any except Shakespeare's. Unfortunately, as already noticed, it contains much besides a strictly English vocabulary. It is a sort of cosmopolitan vocabulary. But fortunately, what is strictly English in it is of very wide range.

b. Browning does not hesitate to coin words when he needs them, or thinks he needs them, *e.g.*

(1) "malleolable"[2] — From Latin *malleus*, a hammer, we have *malleable*, capable of being shaped by the blows of a hammer. But Browning wants a more discriminating word. So from *malleolus*, the diminutive of *malleus*, he

[1] P. 576, ll. 1–3.

[2] In *The Ring and the Book*, p. 658, l. 44.

gets *malleolable*, capable of being shaped by blows of a little hammer.

(2) "unstridulosity" [1] — We have the adjective *stridulous*, making a sharp creaking sound, the verb *stridulate*, the noun *stridulation*, and so on. But we do not find in any of the dictionaries either *stridulosity* or *unstridulosity*. Browning, however, supposes from *stridulous* a noun *stridulosity* which would mean the act, or quality, of being stridulous, *i.e.* the giving of a creaking sound (but a sense somewhat different from that of *stridulation*), and then he uses a negative prefix and makes *unstridulosity*, the absence of such an act, or quality. He uses the word figuratively in the connection, meaning simply the quietness of the man, while the others "creak, creak, creak." (See ll. following.)

(3) "un-mouse-colours" [2] — This is a compilation, of course. From the verb to *color* and the noun *mouse-color*, Browning supposes a verb to *mouse-color* and then prefixes *un-* and gets a verb to *un-mouse-color*, *i.e.* to take the mouse-color off from the skin of the oxen referred to in the passage.

But these coinings are mentioned here chiefly as curiosities. The main point has to do with words that are standard English.

c. Browning knows how to use words so as to give an impression of great wealth and beauty of diction, perhaps surpassed only by Shelley at his best (as *e.g.* in *Adonais*). By way of illustration:

(1) In *The Last Ride Together*, stanza III, the description of a sunset: [3]

> "Hush! if you saw some western cloud
> All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed

[1] In *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, p. 922, l. 78.

[2] In *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, p. 930, l. 12.

[3] P. 352, ll. 43–46.

By many benedictions — sun's
And moon's and evening-star's at once —"

(2) The beginning of *Johannes Agricola in Meditation:* [1]

"There's heaven above, and night by night
I look right through its gorgeous roof;
No suns and moons though e'er so bright
Avail to stop me; splendour-proof
I keep the broods of stars aloof:
For I intend to get to God,
For 'tis to God I speed so fast,
For in God's breast, my own abode,
Those shoals of dazzling glory passed,
I lay my spirit down at last."

And so in an immense number of instances.

3. And in *the drawing of pictures* on a larger scale than in single words and phrases, Browning excels. This is related, of course, both to his choice of words and to his wealth of diction. His poems abound in vividness, — scenes cut out like cameos and quite unforgettable — some humorous, some serious, but all showing this skill. In that little poem *By the Fire-side* are a dozen word-pictures, any one of them worth transferring to canvas in crayon. In *Love among the Ruins*, you can see just how the country looks,[2]

"Where the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles
Miles and miles."

In *Evelyn Hope*, you can see the darkened room and the streaming in of the

"two long rays thro' the hinge's chink." [3]

In his longer poems there is a lavish abundance of word-pictures, *e.g.* the autumn evening in *Sordello:* [4]

[1] P. 445, ll. 10–19.
[2] P. 220, ll. 65, 66.
[3] P. 229, l. 16.
[4] P. 104, ll. 37–41.

"A last remains of sunset dimly burned
O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned
By the wind back upon its bearer's hand
In one long flare of crimson; as a brand,
The woods beneath lay black."

You will find this quality in Browning's writings almost anywhere, but perhaps more strikingly in *Paracelsus* and *The Ring and the Book.*

4. And a fourth excellence is *the beauty and melody of his lines.*

a. It is usually charged that Robert Browning cannot write musical lines. This charge has been passed from mouth to mouth until it is widely believed. But the fact that once everybody believed that the world was flat didn't make it so. And the repetition of the statement that Browning's verses are not musical doesn't make it so. The longer I have read Browning the more I have come to doubt such statements. There's music and music — there's the Jew's harp and there's the pipe-organ.

b. Now, Browning did write a large number of harsh lines of blank verse and usually did it on purpose, because the harsh line conveyed an impression of the condition described; *e.g.* in the beginning of *The Ring and the Book*, a line which can be cited as unusually harsh: he speaks of a ring found

"After a dropping April; found alive
Spark-like 'mid unearthed slope-side figtree-roots
That roof old tombs at Chiusi."

That line [1]

"Spark-like 'mid unearthed slope-side figtree-roots"

is certainly rough enough. But, bless you, would smooth lines convey the impression of the torn up condition of

[1] P. 649, l. 5.

the ground where the ring is found after the rain? It seems to me that the harsh torn line goes with the torn soil. So with a host of illustrations.

It is true that Browning did not polish his blank verse so much as Tennyson did, but he has the stronger vigor of lines on that account. And the harshness of his lines has been grossly exaggerated. If you'll pardon the reference to myself: I repeated, some time ago, a mass of *The Ring and the Book* (three-quarters of Caponsacchi's monologue), an hour and a half of it, in a college town in Michigan. And students in the Senior Class went to their Professor of English and said: "How's this? We understood that Browning's lines are rough and harsh. We couldn't see it in that hour and a half of them." On the contrary, you will look long to find anything superior in melody to great blocks of Browning's blank verse in *The Ring and the Book*, not simply in Caponsacchi's speech but also in Pompilia's monologue or the Pope's. There is not time to quote, but I may start a few:

(1) P. 783, ll. 43 sqq.,

"There was a fancy came."

(2) P. 796, ll. 44 sqq.,

"And, all day, I sent prayer like incense up."

(3) Almost anywhere on pp. 798–802, the closing part of Pompilia's monologue. Begin *e.g.* with p. 798, l. 5,

"For me
'Tis otherwise; let men take, sift my thoughts,"

or p. 800, l. 55,

"For that most woeful man my husband once,"

or p. 801, l. 47,

"O lover of my life, O soldier-saint."

(4) The Pope, p. 852, ll. 37 sqq.,

"First of the first,
Such I pronounce Pompilia."

You will notice the melody also in many other monologues of *The Ring and the Book*, and in *Cleon*, *Andrea del Sarto*, *A Death in the Desert*, and other blank verse pieces. I might add the lines from *Balaustion's Adventure:* [1]

"Whereat the softened eyes
Of the lost maidenhood that lingered still
Straying among the flowers in Sicily."

But there is no use in multiplying illustrations to substantiate a fact that is perfectly obvious.

c. And in short poems Browning has abundance of melody.

(1) We have only to think of the long vibrating lines of *Abt Vogler*, flexible as a whiplash, *e.g.*[2]

"Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker, Thou, of houses not made with hands!"

or the beauty of the long line and short line combination in *Love among the Ruins*, or the effect of many of his lyrics, such as "I send my heart up to thee, all my heart," [3] or "Dance, yellows and whites and reds." [4]

(2) And Browning has done what they've all been trying to do — make the movement of the lines themselves reflect the thing described or narrated. Thus, *e.g.* in the little poem *Meeting at Night*.[5] The picture in the first stanza is what some of you have seen when coming in at evening on the coast. Now start to read the stanza out loud:

[1] P. 573, ll. 32–34.
[2] P. 500, ll. 25, 26.
[3] The first song of *In a Gondola*, p. 346, ll. 21–27.
[4] At end of the parleying with *Gerard de Lairesse*, p. 1276, ll. 67–75.
[5] P. 228, ll. 15–26.

"The grey sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;"

and the long vowels and liquid consonants make these two lines move slowly in spite of you. But the rapidity of the third and fourth lines is very evident, the voice quickening involuntarily with the sharp consonants and the increased proportion of short vowels:

"And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep."

This all corresponds exactly to the scene — sea and land and moon all serene, and then our attention suddenly attracted by the dancing waves at the bow of the boat — these more noticeable in the shallow water just as the boat strikes the sand. The second stanza accomplishes much the same thing: Lines 1 and 2 move slowly and serenely, as the man crosses "a mile of warm sea-scented beach" and "three fields," — both are lines in which long vowels prevail, — but lines 3 and 4, describing what happens at the house, move quickly with an accumulation of such words as "tap," "quick," "scratch," "spurt," "match," — all with short vowels and crisp consonants. The poem is a masterly piece of work, but the technique with which it is done nowhere obtrudes. Of course, in any such work, the finer the technique the more it serves the thought, but the less attention it attracts to itself, — and perfect technique would attract no attention at all. Such is the irony of art.

(3) Browning's short poems, again, are not so polished as Tennyson's. But often they are very effective by reason of sheer ruggedness.

d. I am sure that many of Browning's harsh and curious rhymes are made in fun. They always occur in some

serio-comic thing like *The Heretic's Tragedy* or *A Grammarian's Funeral*, or in some jovial thing like *Old Pictures in Florence* or *A Likeness* or the Prologue to *Ferishtah's Fancies*, or in some sarcastic thing like *Pacchiarotto*. Someone ought to get out a book on Browning's humorous vein.[1] He was so human that he couldn't help seeing the funny side to some things which are really very serious and many things which have serious pretensions. The mixture of humor and seriousness in many of his poems, just as it exists in human life, is very interesting. And it is quite plain that in some poems he purposely exaggerates the funny side; and some poems, of course, are altogether jocular in tone. But many critics have not had the saving grace of humor themselves and so have taken in downright earnest what Browning means as a humorous exercise. So they are inclined to think him a poor artist when what he is drawing is intended to be nothing but a caricature. The ridiculous rhymes in *A Grammarian's Funeral* are simply to help out the grotesqueness of the whole thing. To understand them so is altogether in keeping with the pedantic tone of the man in whose mouth the poem is put. And the grotesqueness is, no doubt, quite true to the extravagances of these first students in the Revival of Learning. So we get "cock-crow . . . rock-row,"[2] "overcome it . . . summit,"[3] "fabric . . . dab brick,"[4] "far gain . . . bargain,"[5] "failure . . . pale lure,"[6] "loosened . . . dew send."[7] And the rhymes in *A Likeness* are atrocious, *e.g.*[8]

[1] Vida Dutton Scudder has done something of this in her book *The Life of the Spirit in the Modern English Poets*, Boston, 1895, pp. 201–238.

[2] P. 366, ll. 56–58.
[3] P. 366, ll. 68–70.
[4] P. 367, ll. 36–38.
[5] P. 367, ll. 64–66.
[6] P. 367, ll. 76–78.
[7] P. 368, ll. 12–14.
[8] P. 518, ll. 75–78.

"That hair's not so bad, where the gloss is,
But they've made the girl's nose a proboscis:
Jane Lamb, that we danced with at Vichy!
What, is not she Jane? Then, who is she?"

So are the performances in the Prologue to *Ferishtah's Fancies*, "Italy" rhyming "spit ally," [1] "unpalatable" — "each who's able," [2] "masticate" — "peptics' state." [3] Now, no one with common sense can suppose that these things were done otherwise than on purpose to be in keeping with the spirit of these poems. Whether that's wit or not is another question, but it is not to be charged up to awkwardness and careless workmanship.

5. Browning's great *use of alliteration* ought to be mentioned. Examples are hardly needed:

"Or, August's hair afloat in filmy fire." [4]
"I see the same stone strength of white despair." [5]
"Some dervish desert-spectre, swordsman, saint." [6]

Referring again to presenting Caponsacchi before an audience, — on more than one occasion people have spoken to me of noticing the immense prevalence of alliteration as they listened. If illustrations from Caponsacchi are desired:

"In glided a masked muffled mystery,
Laid lightly a letter on the opened book." [7]

"Out of the coach into the inn I bore
The motionless and breathless pure and pale
Pompilia." [8]

"Still breathless, motionless, sleep's self,
Wax-white, seraphic, saturate with the sun." [9]

[1] P. 1217, ll. 2–4.
[2] P. 1217, ll. 22–24.
[3] P. 1217, ll. 29–31.
[4] P. 666, l. 30.
[5] P. 882, l. 66.
[6] P. 911, l. 29.
[7] P. 758, ll. 72, 73.
[8] P. 770, ll. 31–33.
[9] P. 771, ll. 66, 67.

In the last two illustrations we have not only initial alliteration, but, in "breathless" and "motionless," we have final alliteration in *-less*.

There is such a thing as overdoing alliteration, and Browning may be in danger of that, although his alliteration seldom produces anything except a pleasant effect — a sense of melody and harmony.[1]

6. One more point must be spoken of among the excellences of Browning's literary art, and that is *cadence of lines*. In his blank verse, he manages cadence with great skill. Cadence (literally, *falling*) is a thing that can't be taught. It must lie in the soul of the poet. It is not so much in the words as in the atmosphere of the line. It is that which makes you realize that things are coming to a conclusion. In single lines, it is that which causes the voice to drop in spite of you and creates in your thoughts a sense that the poet has written something ultimate. For a case of prolonged cadence, one should be familiar with the last 50 lines of Pompilia's monologue in *The Ring and the Book*. For the finest cadence Browning ever wrote in a single line, take this from *Cleon:*[2]

"Within the eventual element of calm."

Few poets have been able to handle cadence, and the greatest poets have written only a few such lines. The two most famous lines for cadence are probably Milton's, in *Sampson Agonistes*,[3]

[1] Prof. John B. Nykerk, in conversation, has raised the question whether Browning was influenced by Old English alliterative verse, or, leaving the O. E. literature out of account, whether it may not be possible that certain elements of personality and tendency to grapple with life, which developed the alliterative verse-form in Anglo-Saxon days, may be the same that produce in Browning's poems such a high degree of alliteration.

[2] P. 468, l. 32.

[3] *Sampson Agonistes*, l. 598, (Cambridge Ed., Boston, 1899, p. 301).

"And I shall shortly be with them that rest,"

and Tennyson's, in *Guinevere*,[1]

"To where beyond these voices there is peace."

But it seems to me the cadence in this line of Browning's is fully equal to that in the others.

"And I shall shortly be with them that rest."
"To where beyond these voices there is peace."
"Within the eventual element of calm."

Surely Browning's line is as good as the best.

7. *Poetic imagination* is closely related to craftsmanship in the art of verse. The first essential is that a man have somewhat to write, and fundamental to this is poetic imagination. But the subject is too large to be discussed here. It may be added, however, that in extent, daring, and vividness, Browning's imagination is equal to that of the greatest poets of the world. This is plain in the whole conception and handling of his work. Even those who grudge to concede to Browning a firstclass skill in versification are obliged to pay their tribute to his mind. Certainly his works show on every page the vast power of an imagination which is creative and life-giving in the highest degree.

In choice of words, then, in wealth of diction, in ability to draw word-pictures, in beauty and melody of lines, in use of alliteration, and in the producing of cadence, we find Browning a literary artist of high rank. And in poetic imagination, he is without a superior.

[1] The last line of *Guinevere* in the *Idylls of the King*, (Globe Ed., New York 1892, p. 458).

III

INTRODUCTION (CONCLUDED): OUR PLAN OF STUDY IN THIS COURSE

A WORD about our plan of study in this course.

1. There is no way to understand Browning except by reading Browning and reading a large amount of Browning. This brings our minds into harmony with his, and we understand him easily. Nothing can ever take the place of this.

2. The surest rule for dealing with a passage which is difficult to understand is the rule already in vogue among Browning students: Read it. If you don't understand it, read it again. If you don't understand it then, read it again. If still you don't understand it, read it again. And read it until you do understand it. This is scientific. The trouble is that either the thought or the method of expressing it is unusual. Therefore, we need to have our minds tuned up to it. By reading it we are tuning our minds up to Browning's when he wrote it, — and presently it is plain and easy to us.

3. These principles, that the only way to understand Browning is to read much of him and to read till we understand, will govern our study in this course.

4. Our general plan will be to go from short poems to the longer and more complex ones. Sometimes I shall

have to assign more than we can discuss in class. We will begin with some of the short poems next time.[1]

[1] In the college classes, at the close of each lecture, the poems to be discussed at the next meeting of the class have been assigned. The assignment has grouped the shorter poems and could usually be read in two hours, though sometimes it would take more. Reading once the assignments has been required. Students have been also advised to read twice, if possible, all assignments, *i.e.* before the lecture dealing with them and after the lecture. Twice reading could not, of course, be required, because of time consumed in once reading the Browning assignment and in attending to the outside reading. In examination, each student has had to answer whether he has done all the reading assigned in Browning's works and outside of Browning's works.

IV

SOME OF THE SHORT POEMS PUBLISHED BEFORE MRS. BROWNING'S DEATH

THE titles of Browning's volumes as they appeared have been preserved as headings of the divisions in his collected works, with only one modification.[1] But many short poems are not now found under the general heading which corresponds to the volume in which they first appeared. This is on account of the redistribution made by Browning in his collected works of 1863 and 1868. Thus, *e.g. Men and Women*, 2 vols., when published in 1855, contained 51 poems. Now only 13 are left standing in that division of his works, and of these only eight were in the original *Men and Women*, the other five being three that appeared in *Dramatic Lyrics*, 1842, and two from *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, 1845. At the same time, 43 poems that appeared in *Men and Women* in 1855 are now distributed under several different divisions of the collected works. This was done, of course, simply because Browning, having his works before him, saw that these poems, by reason of subject and treatment, belong more appropriately under other general heads. *Men and Women* is cited simply as an illustration of the shaking up which took place in all the volumes of short poems.[2] The matter

[1] *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, 1845, has been shortened to simply *Dramatic Romances*.

[2] The short poems published in volumes subsequent to 1868 stand now in the works under the titles of those volumes, and in the same order in which they first appeared.

is mentioned here to avoid confusion in the mind of the reader, when he notices that, in the following comment on some of the short poems, a poem is said to have been published in a certain volume, and then finds the poem now in an entirely different division of Browning's works.

I. Cavalier Tunes, pp. 219, 220

Published in *Dramatic Lyrics*, 1842.

1. These songs are set in the war between King Charles I, of England, and the Parliament, 1642–45. The cavaliers who sing them are on the King's side.

2. The songs are full of references to the men of the time: King Charles (born 1600, crowned 1625, beheaded 1649) and his opponents — Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), John Pym (1584–1643), John Hampden (1594–1643), Sir Arthur Hazelrig (died 1661), Nathaniel Fiennes (1608–1669), "Young Harry" (beheaded 1662) son of Sir Henry Vane. Prince Rupert of Bavaria (1619–1682), grandson of James I, went to England at the beginning of the Civil War to help the cause of his uncle, King Charles. His coming appears in the first song, encouraging the cavaliers. "Kentish Sir Byng" is some knight from Kent, no historical person.

3. These are real soldier-songs. Songs in Literature put into the mouths of soldiers are usually too literary, and too soft and musical. These are rough songs such as real soldiers might sing. The historical names mentioned are names that were in everyone's mouth in those days. The songs have plenty of rough soldier-spirit, with sneers at the Puritans on account of their short hair ("crop-headed Parliament" in the first song, "Roundheads" in the third song), with Cromwell's nickname "Noll" (for Oliver), and with the use of such words as

"the devil" and "hell" without which a soldier's song would be feeble, and even a stronger word when Cromwell's troopers are mentioned in the second song. The word "carles" (twice in first song) means churls — the two words are doublets from Old English *ceorl*.

4. Browning has given to the chorus of the third song the movement of galloping horses, *i.e.* it certainly seems as if the line

"Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

gallops as you read it.

II. The Lost Leader, p. 220

Published 1845, in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*.

The poem refers to one who deserts the people's cause. The poem is a severe one. From the fact that it mentions Shakespeare, Milton, Burns, Shelley, as being on the people's side, it is natural to suppose that the recreant is a literary man. Wordsworth fills the bill, — a liberal in his youth and intensely moved by the French Revolution — in later years opposing innovations and progressive legislation. In 1875, Browning was asked if he referred to Wordsworth in the poem and answered:[1] "I have been asked the question you now address me with, and as duly answered, I can't remember how many times. There is no sort of objection to one more assurance, or rather confession, on my part, that I *did* in my hasty youth presume to use the great and venerable personality of Wordsworth as a sort of painter's model; one from which this or the other particular feature may be selected and turned to account."

[1] We quote only a part of the letter. It was printed in Grosart's Edition of Wordsworth's *Prose Works*, and is reprinted in Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopædia*, pp. 256, 257.

III. Garden Fancies, pp. 222–224

These were first printed in *Hood's Magazine*, July, 1844, and then were included in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, 1845.

1. The first one, *The Flower's Name*, is made up of the thoughts of a lover as he walks again where he walked in the garden with his sweetheart, where so many things are associated with her, but especially the flower whose name she told him. The poem is gentle and delicate.

2. The second, *Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis*, is full of exuberant humor, drawing the contrast between a dead book of philosophy and the real world of living things.

a. The title is the name of the author of the old book supposed to be brought into the garden. Griffin and Minchin, in their *Life of Browning*, point out that he met such names in reading as a boy Nathaniel Wanley's *Wonders of the Little World* [1] in his father's library. *Schafnaburgensis* means a native of the city of Aschaffenburg, on the river Main in the province of Lower Franconia in Bavaria.

b. The poem is so fine a thing that we are justified in adding these notes:

P. 223, l. 44. The punctuation at the end of this line in the Globe Edition should be a comma instead of a period. The sentence runs on into the next stanza.

l. 46, *arbute*, arbutus, a genus of evergreen shrubs, of the heath family. There are several species. This is probably the most common one, called the "strawberry tree" from its fruit which outwardly resembles the strawberry. Not to be confused with the "trailing arbutus" of the U. S. A.

[1] Wanley's book was published in 1678. There are also editions of 1774 and 1800–07.

laurustine, (also spelled laurestine), *Viburnum tinus*, an evergreen shrub or tree of the south of Europe; it flowers during the winter months.

l. 50, *Stonehenge*, on Salisbury Plain eight miles north of Salisbury. The remains, supposed to be of Druid origin, consist of upright stones and some horizontal slabs. The original plan of the whole can be made out. A traveller might well be tempted to count the stones.

l. 55, *pont-levis*, drawbridge (literally, light bridge).

l. 66, *Chablis*, a town in France in the department of Yonne, famous for its wines — hence *Chablis*, wine from this place. Not to be confused with Chablais [1] in Savoy.

l. 67, *oaf*, a repulsive elf, used here figuratively for the book.

l. 68, *Rabelais*, François Rabelais (1495–1553), great scholar and humorist of the Renaissance, evidently a favorite with Browning.[2]

l. 70, *limbo*, a supposed border land somewhere between Heaven and Hell, where certain souls have to await judgment. Hence any place apart from the world, place of confinement.

l. 72, *akimbo*, with elbows sticking out and hands on hips.

ll. 74, 75, *de profundis, accentibus lœtis, cantate!*, out of the depths sing with joyful tones, (or accents).

P. 224, l. 2, *right of trover*, right to a thing that is found. Laws of trover refer to possession of things one finds in highways and such places.

l. 11, *John Knox*, 1505–1572, Scottish reformer, severe Presbyterian, very Puritanical, *e.g.* his volume, 1558,

[1] Cf. *A Likeness*, p. 518, l. 67, "And the chamois-horns ('shot in the Chablais')."

[2] Cf. *A Likeness*, p. 518, l. 70, "And the little edition of Rabelais."

entitled *Blasts of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. Of course, nothing could be more ludicrous than John Knox fastened into the front row in an opera house and obliged to witness a ballet.

l. 17, *sufficit*, it is enough.

c. According to the poem, Browning (or whoever is speaker of the lines) reads the old dry book conscientiously

"From title-page to closing line,"

and then proceeds to his revenge. This consists in dumping the book down the hollow trunk of an old plum-tree. That was "last month." Some days have passed, and meantime the book has lain there among the rain-drippings and all the wild creatures that inhabit the decaying inside of the old tree. The buoyant fancy of Browning revels in the contrast between the dead book and the living things. This morning, he fishes up the book with a rake and promises it a return to his shelf where it can

"Dry-rot at ease till the Judgment-day."

d. The poem abounds in gentle irony. This dreary book is called "our friend," "my bookshelf's magnate," "his delectable treatise."

e. The poem should be read many times. It will be found highly rejuvenating to drooping spirits. Only a few lines need be quoted as samples:

(1) The spider whose web had been woven across the hole in the tree:

"Now, this morning, betwixt the moss
And gum that locked our friend in limbo,
A spider had spun his web across,
And sat in the midst with arms akimbo."

(2) Everyone knows how disastrous to the appearance

of a book a wetting is, but no one has ever told it more skilfully than Browning here:

"Here you have it, dry in the sun,
With all the binding all of a blister,
And great blue spots where the ink has run,
And reddish streaks that wink and glister
O'er the page so beautifully yellow:
Oh, well have the droppings played their tricks!"

Then comes a very funny turn — did this dry-as-dust philosopher of long ago know anything about things that have become associated with his book?

"Did he guess how toadstools grow, this fellow?
Here's one stuck in his chapter six!"

(3) Then follows that turning loose of the poet's imagination as to the incongruous experiences of the old book,

"when the live creatures
Tickled and toused and browsed him all over,"

in the midst of

"All that life and fun and romping,
All that frisking and twisting and coupling."

It partakes of Browning's sympathy with all forms of life.

IV. MEETING AT NIGHT, PARTING AT MORNING, p. 228

Published in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, 1845.

1. These are certainly two exquisite bits of scenery, and something besides.

2. Browning has the courage to make them true and vivid, where a poet given to more polishing would have removed them from reality. Thus, if the over-nice object to such phrases as "the slushy sand" and the "blue spurt" of the match, they must remember that the sand at the water's edge is simply *slushy* and that the "blue spurt"

of the phosphorus and sulphur match (the kind of match everybody used to have) is what we saw evening after evening. I am reminded of a discussion between some theological students, objecting to the preacher's having said in an illustration that the tide was out and the boats were "stuck in the mud," — the discussion being chiefly how to say the boats were stuck in the mud without saying they were stuck in the mud. There's too much of that nonsense, and Robert Browning would have none of it. He used the words that convey accurately what he was describing.

3. The remarkable quality of *Meeting at Night* has been referred to in our discussion of Browning's literary art. We might call attention to how true to life is the woman's sitting in the dusk waiting for the man to come and lighting the lamp at his tap on the window-pane. The passionate greeting in the last two lines should not be overlooked, her voice less loud than the beating of their hearts.

4. *Parting at Morning* is not such a piece of art as *Meeting at Night*, but it is a worthwhile bit nevertheless. The tide is coming in rapidly — it seems as if the sea comes round the cape of a sudden. The sun comes up over the mountains to the eastward, making a path of gold across the water toward the observer — it is "a path of gold for him," *i.e.* for the sun, as if he were going to travel across the world on the path of gold that is on the water, (*straight*, probably the adjective, predicate after *was*, but maybe the adverb, *straightway*). With the coming of the tide and the sun, the man must hasten back to his business and struggle in the city.

5. Both poems are in the mouth of the man, ***not*** the second one in the mouth of the woman as Dr. Berdoe[1]

[1] Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopædia*, ed. 1912, p. 270.

supposes. "Him" means the sun. The point is that even as the sun goes forth for the day along his golden path, so the man must needs go forth into the "world of men." No wonder that, with such a start, Berdoe finds the fourth line "slightly obscure."

V. Evelyn Hope, p. 229

Published in 1855 in *Men and Women*, vol. I.

1. It is a poem of great intensity. The lover asks us to come and sit by the side of this sixteen-year-old girl where she lies dead, and he succeeds in speaking to us for two stanzas about her, but the rest of the poem is addressed to her. Though he was "thrice as old" as she and though their "paths in the world diverged so wide," he loved her and will love her forever.

2. Stanzas v, vi, and vii would be plainer to us if the punctuation were such as we are accustomed to, *i.e.* with what he intends to say at last to Evelyn Hope enclosed in quotation marks, thus *e.g.*

> When, "Evelyn Hope, what meant," I shall say.

The quotation ends with the fourth line of stanza v, and he goes on to say what he will learn. Then the quotation is resumed with stanza vi, "I have lived," I shall say, and continues to the middle of stanza vii. The remaining four lines are addressed to her now, and would be outside the quotation.

3. We are not to understand from stanzas iv, v, and vi that Browning believes in metempsychosis. He does not give in his support to that doctrine. But the point is that *even if* it is so and he has to be reincarnated over and over again — give himself up and live the life of different men in different ages and different lands — *even if* that is

true, one thing will persist through all his various existences, and that will be his love for Evelyn Hope. And throughout all his existences he will want her, and when he finds her at last, he will refer to "the years long still" "in the lower earth" when his "heart seemed full as it could hold." But it was not full without her:

> "There was place and to spare for the frank young smile,
> And the red young mouth, and the hair's young gold."

And he will tell her:

> "I loved you, Evelyn, all the while."

4. The reader is not to suppose that he has autobiography here. We are in contact with Browning's intense personality, but poets in writing love-poems do not necessarily draw on their own definite experience. Such is the poet's imagination.

5. The more this poem is read the more its extraordinary vividness strikes us. Perhaps no detail contributes more than does the piece of geranium picked by her own hand, still standing in the glass of water but beginning to die too. The geranium is not a poetic and romantic flower, and most poets would avoid it. But Robert Browning is writing of life as it is, and knowing how common geraniums are (or used to be) as house-plants, he puts in a piece of one of Evelyn Hope's geraniums as a true bit of the setting. For this sort of thing we honor him.

VI. Love among the Ruins, pp. 229, 230

Published in 1855, the first poem in vol. I of *Men and Women*.

1. It contrasts the glory and power and ostentation that have been with the love of a girl — the love that

now is, — and finds "love is best." It is a singularly graceful and attractive poem.

2. A few notes may be of use:

a. Consideration shifts alternately from what *was* when the scene was a populous city to what *is* now — just a few ruins[1] and a girl. The emphasis should be strong upon *then* and *now* and all words which distinguish the past from the present, *e.g.* "*he* looked," "*she* looks now," "*they* sent," — so that the two parts will not be confused but each will furnish background for the other.

b. Browning, of course, always scorns the pedantic rules set down in rhetoric books, about prepositions at the end of clauses and sentences. So in this poem (stanzas I and II) he has (1) "its prince . . . held his court in," where elaborately written prose would go: in which its prince held his court; (2) "slopes of verdure, certain rills . . . intersect and give a name to," — slopes of verdure which certain rills intersect and to which they give a name; and (3) "a wall . . . made of marble, men might march on," — a wall on which men might march.

c. The latter half of stanza III — Browning expects that men in the old days were as now, — with hearts pricked up by desire for glory, struck tame by dread of shame, and susceptible to the power of gold — having their price, as cynics say every man has now.

d. Stanza V — *fleece*, meaning that which is covered by fleece viz. the flock of sheep; *girl with eager eyes and yellow hair*, Browning seems fond of yellow-haired girls, cf. Porphyria.[2]

e. Stanza VI — There should be no mistake about the third and fourth lines. Many editions do not print cor-

[1] In fact, only the basement of the great tower remains (stanza IV).

[2] In *Porphyria's Lover*, p. 375, ll. 43, 45, 64.

rectly *glades'*, possessive plural — the colonnades of the glades. There were temples on the mountains in the distance (none near, stanza II) and there were colonnades in the glades. *Causeys*, causeways. In the latter half of the stanza — notice that there will be two kinds of embraces: (1) *first* her eyes will embrace his face, (2) then the lover and the girl will embrace each other.

f. Stanza VII — As to the pillar built to their gods by the ancient inhabitants: (1) The pillar was made of the brass of captured chariots (chariots captured by these million fighters sent out in a single year), and yet in spite of using so many they were able to reserve a thousand chariots which were specially fine, being ornamented with gold. This makes "Gold, of course" apply to these 1000 chariots. (2) It may be, however, that "Gold, of course" has nothing to do with "chariots," but means simply an additional item as to the wealth of the city: "Of course there was plenty of gold," even though a million men were sent to war in a single year. (3) Further, it may be that the brazen pillar has nothing to do with captured chariots (although such use of such spoils would be quite consistent with ancient customs), and that the 1000 chariots reserved are a thousand of the king's own, *i.e.* although he sent 1,000,000 men to war that year, he could still reserve 1000 chariots at home. The words "in full force" favor this interpretation.

As to the latter part of this stanza: (1) It may be that "Earth's returns etc." is in apposition with "blood that freezes etc." *i.e.* "blood that freezes etc." is all there really is of the wealth and glory. (2) Or it may more likely be that "Oh heart! oh blood that freezes etc." is this lover's own heart and blood, and that the exclamation "Earth's returns etc." is independent and means: such are earth's

returns — these ruins here. (3) In either case, "Shut them in" is addressed to nobody in particular, exactly as "let them go" might be, and means practically "let them be," "let them alone," — the "them" being those who struggled in those "centuries of folly, noise and sin." How he esteems what they struggled for is shown by his mentioning a couple of items and then dismissing it with the words "and the rest." In contrast to it all, love in the present hour is best.

3. This belief in the beauty of life in the present hour and this doctrine that love is best are very like so much of Browning. This is a good love-poem. Of course, if people don't want love-poems, they mustn't read them. But if we're going to have love-poems at all, let's have them red-blooded and intense. No pale-blooded love-poem is worth writing or worth reading.

VII. "De Gustibus —" pp. 238, 239

Published in vol. II of *Men and Women*, 1855.

1. The title is a part of the Latin proverb "De gustibus non disputandum est," there should be no dispute concerning tastes (literally, concerning tastes it must not be disputed).

2. This is a bit of humor. The point is: if the soul after death keeps the same tastes it had while in the body, then the ghost of each will walk in the places he used to like most. Thus the ghost of the lover of trees will walk in an English lane and then with that alertness which is always in Browning's best work, he sees the ghost of such a tree-lover walking in the lane,

> "By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies,"

and urges him to get out of the way, so as not to frighten the boy and girl making love in the hazel coppice. Anyone accustomed to walking in English lanes knows how often you come upon the boy and girl making love. We

should not miss Browning's sympathy with them nor the sadness of the fact that youth is so soon over:

"And let them pass, as they will too soon,
With the bean-flowers' boon,
And the blackbird's tune,
And May, and June!"

3. Every ghost to the spot he liked best before he became a ghost. Therefore, Robert Browning's ghost will go to Italy, for

"What I love best in all the world
Is a castle, precipice-encurled,
In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine."

So his ghost will very likely be around a place like that, or else

"In a sea-side house to the farther South."

We hardly need to call attention to the picturesqueness of the *gash* in the mountain and the precipice *curling* about the castle, and of each of the details of the scene further south, each detail chosen not for elegance but to be exactly true to Browning's memory of such places, and ending with the bare-footed girl and her melons and her anarchistic sympathies, true to what Browning knew so well of many of the Italian peasants.

4. Apropos of this confession, as to whither his tastes turn, Browning breaks out,

"Italy, my Italy!"

And catching at Queen Mary's[1] words about Calais, he writes:

"Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it, 'Italy.'
Such lovers old are I and she:
So it always was, so shall ever be!"

[1] Mary Tudor, Queen of England from 1553 to 1558.

VIII. HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM ABROAD; HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM THE SEA, p. 239

Published in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, 1845. They were at that time arranged under one heading *Home Thoughts from Abroad*, the first as "Oh, to be in England" and the other as "Nobly Cape St. Vincent," and between them was another, "Here's to Nelson's Memory," which is now placed as the third poem under *Nationality in Drinks* (p. 222).

1. *Home-Thoughts from Abroad* are the thoughts of an Englishman, who is away where the "gaudy melon-flower" is (probably in Italy), as the English spring comes up before his mind's eye. He describes it beautifully. If there is one thing in the poem finer than the rest, it is the reference to the thrush and the exquisite fancy as to why he sings as he does:

> "That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
> Lest you should think he never could recapture
> The first fine careless rapture!"

2. *Home-Thoughts from the Sea* are the thoughts of an Englishman at sight of Trafalgar, where Lord Nelson won the great victory over the combined fleets of France and Spain on Oct. 21, 1805, and Gibraltar, which has been held since 1704 as one of the bulwarks of the British Empire. With fresh realization of what Trafalgar and Gibraltar mean, he says:

> "Here and here did England help me: how can I help England?"

He wants everyone to ask that question — everyone who turns as he turns, this evening, to God, "to praise and pray." Any normal Englishman ought to have his patriotism and his religious thinking stirred by passing Trafalgar and Gibraltar.

"The first four lines of *Home-Thoughts from the Sea* are an exact transcript of the scene which he [Browning] beheld from the deck of the *Norham Castle* on the evening of Friday, 27 April, 1838, on his first voyage to Italy." [1]

IX. BY THE FIRE-SIDE, pp. 245–248

Published in vol. I of *Men and Women*, 1855.

1. The situation is just this: The man looks forward to "life's November" — what will he be doing then? Why, he will be sitting by the fire "deep in Greek." And "the young ones" (probably grandchildren), seeing him so absorbed will slip away to cut "from the hazels" a mainmast for their "ship." He will forget his book, however, and his thoughts will go back to that day in the Apennines with the woman he loved, when their two lives were poured together into one life forevermore. His mind goes over again each detail of the scene and each incident of their walk. The poem is really addressed to the same woman, his wife, who sits opposite him at the fireside. So, at the end, his thoughts come back from that event of the past and gather about her now. He reiterates his intention of having that crowning evening to think about in the autumn of his life.

2. It is hardly too much to say that the poem, from first to last, is altogether delightful and wonderful. It is useless to try to make quotations from it, because there is no good place to stop.

3. The place described is probably a gorge near the Baths of Lucca. The Brownings had spent the summer at the Baths of Lucca in 1849 and again in 1853. The wife sits yonder, (stanza LII),

> "Musing by fire-light, that great brow
> And the spirit-small hand propping it."

[1] Griffin and Minchin, *Life of Browning*, p. 127.

This describes Mrs. Browning. That is a curious fancy — a "spirit-small hand," *i.e.* a hand as small as a spirit has. It is true, of course, that Browning proposed to his wife in London, not in a gorge in the Apennines. But it is also undoubtedly true that we have here a confession of his love for her and how much it has meant to him. It is simply a case of putting the truth of his own love into a natural setting of which he was fond, viz. this mountain gorge.

X. The Guardian-Angel, pp. 257, 258

Published in vol. II of *Men and Women*, 1855.

1. Subtitle, *A Picture at Fano.* (*a*) Fano is a city at the mouth of the river Metauro, in the province of Urbino-and-Pesaro, on the east coast of Italy. (*b*) Robert Browning and his wife visited Fano in the summer of 1848 — stayed three days there and then went to Ancona. (*c*) The painting referred to is by an artist of Bologna, named Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (1590–1666), called Guercino ("squint-eyed"), and by this nickname he is generally known, — "Guercino drew this angel" (stanza VI). (*d*) The picture is on a tomb in the church of St. Augustine. It represents a little child at prayer, while an angel stands over him, with wings outspread, the left arm around the child, the right hand closing over the child's clasped hands. (*e*) Three times Mr. and Mrs. Browning went to this church to sit and look at this picture (stanza VII). (*f*) The poem was evidently written at Ancona (stanza VIII, last line).

2. Protestants have discarded the doctrine that there is a guardian angel for each one of us, but Catholics devoutly hold it. Browning feels keenly how beautiful a thing it would be to have that angel, when done with the child, step out of the picture over to him and do for him what

is being done for the child. Only Browning needs it more, world-worn as he is.

3. The poem goes to pieces toward the end. The friend spoken of in stanza VI is Alfred Domett, who went to New Zealand and settled in 1842. He is the man called *Waring* in the poem of that title (pp. 348–351). The Wairoa (stanza VIII) is a river in New Zealand. The last three stanzas are distracted between Mrs. Browning and Alfred Domett, and are a poor ending, diverting attention from the point.

4. But the first five stanzas are addressed directly to the angel on the tomb, and are very discerning. They come to a good conclusion and should be read as a poem by themselves. There will come times in any tired man's life when he will deeply appreciate them.

XI. The Patriot, p. 333

Published in vol. I of *Men and Women*, 1855.

1. The subtitle is *An Old Story*. And it certainly is an old and oft-repeated story how men have done their utmost to help their country and have come to the hangman's rope or the headsman's axe. The leaders of the American Revolution of 1776 knew what they were facing; it is related that they said grimly: "We must hang together or we'll hang separately." Of course, George Washington was a traitor to the British crown. But, being successful in leading the American colonists, he became "the father of his country." Furthermore, there are plenty of examples of the fickleness of the populace, — on a man's side when he's winning, deserting him when he fails. This also is an old story.

2. In the case described in the poem, a man has in wholesouled devotion given himself for his country, — at first

successfully, attended by great applause at his entry into the city, but later the tide has turned against him and now he is on his way out to be hanged. Very naturally the contrast is bitter in his thoughts, between how he entered exactly a year ago and how he goes out to-day. And the contrast could not easily be better described than Browning does it. A year ago,

> "It was roses, roses, all the way,
> With myrtle mixed in my path like mad,"

and house-roofs loaded with people, church-spires flaming with flags, the sound of so many bells that they filled the air like a mist, and the old walls rocking with the crowd and their cheering. If he had asked them to give him the sun from the skies, they would have agreed at once to take it down and give it to him, and immediately would have asked him what else he wanted. He realizes now that it was he who leaped at the sun to get it and give it to the people, *i.e.* he tried to do for them a great thing, tried to bring great blessing to their lives, and was not able to reach it. Now, a year to the very day from that temporary triumph, he is walking through the streets to his execution. The crowd are on their way to the scaffold at the Shambles' Gate. A few with palsy cannot go, but sit at the windows to see him pass. It rains, and the rope cuts his wrists tied behind him. Anyone who cares to flings a stone at him. He thinks by the feeling that he is bleeding at a wound in the forehead, where a stone has hit him. Sharply the two scenes come to his mind — a year ago and now:

> "Thus I entered, and thus I go!"

"Well," he thinks, "cases have been known where a man in a triumph, overcome by the excitement, has dropped dead. If I had died that day a year ago and had gone

up before God fresh from the approbation of men, I might have been told by God that I had been paid by the world and might have been questioned by God: 'What dost thou owe me?' Now surely I have not been paid by the world. I have done the best I could for my countrymen and what I get is a hanging." The balance is on the other side of the account:

"'Tis God shall repay: I am safer so."

"So," *i.e.* safer trusting God's award than men's.

This paraphrase purposely avoids quoting more completely the phrases in the poem. They are full of extraordinary vividness. This patriot is a fine figure of a man who has held unfalteringly to his ideal and is therefore ready to stand unashamed before God.

XII. The Last Ride Together, pp. 352, 353

Published in vol. I of *Men and Women*, 1855.

1. The circumstances are plain: The lover has been rejected. He accepts it philosophically, and asks the lady to take just one more ride with him, which she agrees to do. He helps her on her horse, (this is the point in stanza III, cf. the last two lines when he is helping her on), and they begin to ride. He doesn't worry about the fact that she has rejected his suit, nor about the fact that he's never going to ride with her again. Enough that he's riding with her now, and he makes the most of it. What's the use in spoiling the present hour by thinking about what has been and what is to be. The main point is that he's riding with her, and that's better for him than soldiers' glory or artists' fame. He has this one chance, and (stanza II)

"Who knows but the world may end to-night?"

And as they ride, it seems to him that Heaven may be only (stanza x)

"The instant made eternity."

Such a perpetuation of this instant would be quite satisfactory to him.

2. The poem is one of Browning's best expressions of his belief in making the most of the hour that now is. It is also one of the richest of his short poems in melody and beauty.

XIII. A Grammarian's Funeral, pp. 366–368

Published in vol. II of *Men and Women*, 1855.

1. This is a piece of rare and curious humor.

2. The circumstances are plain:

a. The time is indicated by the words Browning has put under the title: "Shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe."

b. A Renaissance scholar, whose study has run chiefly to Greek, is now dead, and is borne on the shoulders of his students to burial on a high mountain, the only fit place for burying a man of such high thinking and such high aspirations. The poem is spoken by the leader of the students, as they go on: he begins while they are still on the plain, continues as they come into a city on the mountain-side and march through its market-place, still continues as they wind up the narrow way beyond, and ceases speaking soon after they reach "the platform"[1] on the summit.

c. The poem consists of eulogy of their dead teacher,

[1] P. 368, l. 3, "Well, here's the platform." What is this platform? Is it something built up on which the body is to rest permanently, in a sarcophagus? Or is it a temporary structure on which they are to hold a funeral service? Or does it mean simply the level spot on top of the mountain?

wise and pithy sayings about life (chiefly suggested by his attitude toward life), and parenthetical directions and exhortations to the bearers and other students.

3. The poem gives an accurate reflection of the interesting mixture of pedantry, real sense, and grotesque exaggeration among these first students in the Revival of Learning. Throughout the poem the realization is keen of the pitiful disproportion between the work a scholar puts in and the visible results achieved. This must always be so.

4. Notice some words:

a. Academic terms:

P. 367, l. 16, *he gowned him*, became a student, put on a scholar's gown. Such was the custom in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Whatever use of distinctive academic dress survives in our day owes its origin in some sort to this old custom.

l. 26, *the comment*, commentary written in the margin of manuscripts. Learning is spoken of here figuratively as a book, and to go thoroughly one must read not only the text but the marginal comment.

b. Medical terms:

P. 367, l. 30, *queasy*, nauseated, — used of his mind's devouring everything nor ever getting too much — never getting sick of it. (Not a strictly medical term as the next one is.)

l. 52, *Calculus*, regular medical term for stone, whether in the liver, kidney, bladder, or any other organ of the body. The word is more commonly met in the plural *calculi*.

l. 54, *Tussis*, a cough.

l. 61, *soul-hydroptic*. The more common word is *hydropic* (direct from Latin *hydropicus*, which in turn comes directly from the Greek), but *hydroptic* is found (made from English

hydropsy, erroneously following *epilepsy*, *epileptic*, and the like). *Hydroptic*, dropsical. The point is that in some dropsical conditions there is much thirst, and this man's soul is as thirsty as if it had the dropsy.

c. Greek words:

P. 367, l. 95, *Hoti*, ὅτι, conjunction, *that*, *because*.

l. 96, *Oun*, οὖν, conjunction, *then*, *therefore*.

P. 368, l. 1, *the enclitic De*, δε, inseparable unaccented particle, — not to be confused with the word δέ which means *but*.

d. Why does Browning use such words as these we've been speaking of? Of course, to give atmosphere and color to the poem.

5. According to the poem, the reason why the dead scholar gave himself so unreservedly to his work and denied himself the immediate comfort and good of life was because he wanted the greater good, the "far gain." And he believed that he would not fail of that, because he had confidence that death would not be the end:

> "Others mistrust and say, 'But time escapes:
> Live now or never!'
> He said, 'What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
> Man has Forever.'"

XIV. Porphyria's Lover, p. 375

First printed in *The Monthly Repository*[1] in 1836,[2] under the title *Porphyria* and over the signature "Z." In the same number of *The Monthly Repository* appeared *Johannes Agricola* (now called *Johannes Agricola in Meditation*). In *Dramatic Lyrics*, 1842, these two poems were

[1] Edited by Browning's friend the Rev. W. J. Fox, who had hailed *Pauline* with a long notice in 1833.

[2] New series, vol. X, pp. 43, 44.

yoked together, without individual titles, under one heading *Madhouse Cells; Johannes Agricola* was No I, and *Porphyria* No. II. In the edition of his works in 1863, Browning abandoned the heading *Madhouse Cells. Johannes Agricola in Meditation* now stands among *Men and Women*, p. 445.

1. Porphyria's lover loves her desperately, but is evidently not her social equal (ll. 46–50) and is not sure that his love is requited (ll. 57–60) and is sullen and morbid. But on this evening she has left the gay feast (l. 52) and has come to him through the rain, has stirred up the fire, and then has laid aside her wet cloak and shawl and gloves and has untied her hat and let her damp hair fall, and then has sat down beside him and called him, but he wouldn't answer (l. 40). So she put his arm about her waist and then made her shoulder bare and put her yellow hair out of the way and made his cheek lie on her shoulder, her hair falling again over his face, she meantime murmuring how she loved him. This was too much for his distracted brain. He goes "out of his head." This moment is the fulfillment of everything to him, and the insane thought occurs to him that he can keep it perpetually so by killing her and keeping her there in that position. So he carries out the plan by twisting her long yellow hair into a string and strangling her with it. Only he finds that positions have to be reversed somewhat and his shoulder now supports her head. It is next morning when he tells about it (l. 84), but he has no sense that he has committed a crime. The only thing that bothers him is the possibility that she may have suffered, and he repeats that she felt no pain (ll. 66, 67). The last line of the poem, quoted by some as if so full of meaning, is nothing more nor less than an addition to show the shattered

condition of his mind — he wonders that God hasn't said anything about it.

2. This poem may not be a pleasant thing nor of comfort to any reader. But as a bit of literary art it is remarkable, to say the least. Its chief importance, however, is as a study comprehending much in little, in the line of abnormal psychology.

XV. May and Death, p. 516

First published in *The Keepsake*, 1857. Then included in *Dramatis Personæ*, 1864.

1. The friend "Charles" in the poem is Browning's cousin James Silverthorne.

2. To read the poem, one would at first suppose that the matter involved was not simply the death of a man who had been a friend from childhood up, but rather a matter of desperate love between man and woman, so extreme are the statements. In stanza I, the poet wishes that, when his friend died, three-quarters of the delightful things of spring had died too, and, as far as he is concerned, he wouldn't mind if the other quarter had died also — nothing of the beauty of spring left. He rebukes himself in stanza II, and realizes that there are many who ought to have opportunity to enjoy what he and Charles enjoyed together. So, amending his wholesale wish in the succeeding stanzas, he is in favor of having the spring at its best for the sake of others, only he thinks they wouldn't miss one plant which was so much in the woods where he walked with Charles, if that grew no more again. That plant reminds him so of his friend's death that the spot of red on its leaves comes from his heart, that's all.

3. The plant referred to is the spotted persicaria, *Polygonum persicaria*, which has purple stains, varying in size and vividness, on its leaves.

4. The expression in the early part of the poem, so disproportionate to the grief which we would naturally expect in the poet at loss of his cousin and friend, is consistent with Browning's impulsive nature. So also is that at the end, as to how much the sight of this plant pains him.

V

SOME OF THE SHORT POEMS PUBLISHED AFTER MRS. BROWNING'S DEATH

I. Confessions, p. 516

Published in *Dramatis Personæ*, 1864.

1. The poem is very human and very "Browningesque." The man is dying, and the clergyman is by him with the conventional line of talk. But to the dying man life is good and the world is no vale of tears. Instead of being in a properly solemn frame of mind, he finds his memory running back to light and color in the days gone by, to stolen interviews with the girl he loved. His dying fancy makes up a picture of the scene from the curtain and the medicine bottles.

2. The poem is exceedingly refreshing. Moreover, it is full of the subtle thirst for life and love.

II. Prospice, pp. 516, 517

First printed in *The Atlantic Monthly*, June, 1864.[1] The poem appeared in Browning's volume *Dramatis Personæ* the same year.

1. The poem was written in the autumn of 1861, — the autumn following Mrs. Browning's death. It is out of the innermost of Browning's soul. He looks upon death as the climax, the best and crowning chance to prove

[1] Vol. XIII, p. 694. Cf. Dowden, *Robert Browning*, London, 1904, pp. 274, 275.

what he's made of, — one splendid consummate fight at the last, and then the peace, the light, and clasping Elizabeth Barrett Browning's soul — that will be enough.

2. The dramatic intensity of the poem should have a first place in speaking of it. The description of the near approach to the last struggle and of the coming of the calm after the struggle is very dramatic.

3. The following notes may not come amiss:

a. The title *Prospice* means *Look forward*, or strictly, *Look thou forward*, — imperative singular of the verb *prospicere.*

b. P. 516, l. 71, *to feel the fog in my throat* — one needs to spend a winter in England to appreciate this expression fully. It accurately describes the sensation you sometimes have in London or Oxford — you certainly *feel the fog* in your throat.

c. P. 517, l. 2, *the place*, the place where he must struggle with Death, — the whole being an old figure, the journey of life. When the time comes, he must approach the place where Death waits in the fog and mist and snow, where the storm is thickest. "The foe," "the Arch Fear" (chief Fear, greatest Fear), is Death, but there is no escape, the strong man must pass that way.

d. But Browning has no thought of escape nor of defeat. There stands between him and "the reward of it all" only "one fight more, the best and the last." *Guerdon* (l. 9), requital, reward.

e. He has no wish to die an easy painless death, *e.g.* to die in his sleep as so many wish. He would hate to have Death spare him — bandage his eyes and let him creep past (ll. 13, 14).

f. No, he wants to die splendidly in the fiercest struggle like the heroes of old. And if he hasn't suffered enough

in his life, if he hasn't had enough of pain, darkness, and cold, let them pile it on now and he'll take it, so that the account will be square. He wants to endure "all that's coming to him." This is the meaning of "pay glad life's arrears of pain, darkness and cold."

g. "For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave," (but only *to the brave*). For "the black minute," the intensest of the strife, comes to an end, and he passes out on the other side of storm and night. And all the rage of the elements and the raving of fiend-voices around him "shall dwindle, shall blend," — note how they gradually die down and are transformed and then gradually come out again —

> "Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
> Then a light, then thy breast,
> O thou soul of my soul!"

And he cares not what comes after that — he can leave the rest with God:

> "I shall clasp thee again,
> And with God be the rest!"

4. You will look far before you find a finer piece of work than Browning's *Prospice*, in so few lines, with such dramatic power, such courage, such love, such confidence in Immortality. We suggest that you commit this poem to memory, whether you commit anything else of Browning's or not.

III. A Face, p. 518

Published in *Dramatis Personæ*, 1864.

1. It is a girl's face as the poet would have it done on canvas. Both the drawing and the coloring are with care and artistic taste.

2. *Correggio*, born 1494, died 1534, eminent Italian painter.

IV. A LIKENESS, pp. 518, 519

Published in *Dramatis Personæ*, 1864.

1. *A Likeness* is a genial poem, the point being how little a visitor knows the associations that go with things he notices when he's calling. In describing how a visitor acts toward these things and how he blunders and how we "squirm," it is brisk and incisive.

a. The first example is a portrait hanging in a room where tea is taken —

"And the wife clinks tea-things under."

Her cousin's innocent remark as he looks at the portrait, the wife's spiteful rejoinder, her cousin's further remark, while her husband is extremely self-conscious and aware of the discomfort of his corns! — all this is a pretty good reflection of human nature.

b. The next example is a picture in a bachelor's quarters, with all the things a sporty bachelor accumulates — including a cast of the fist of the boxer from whom he has taken lessons, "the Tipton Slasher"[1] (a man known to the history of fistic sport), playing-cards which have been used to shoot at and are preserved as records of marksmanship, a satin shoe (with a history!) irreverently used for a cigar-case, the horns of a chamois shot in the Chablais in Savoy, a print of Rarey (a famous horse-trainer, Cruiser being probably one of his horses), and one of Sayers (a real boxing champion), and a set of Rabelais in small volumes. But the main thing that concerns us is that there's also a portrait of some girl. The visitor guesses it's Jane Lamb, and guesses wrong. His remarks are

[1] The parenthetical quotations with which Browning accompanies many of the things mentioned are, of course, explanatory remarks by the owner of the "spoils."

only in careless jest and exaggeration, but we can readily imagine how with every word he's "getting in wrong."

c. The third example is an etching which the speaker owns. He tells, in a breezy way, of his friend's visit and of his emotions when the visitor admires this etching, and how he puts him off and presents him a piece of Volpato's (eminent engraver, 1738–1803). He realizes that if his visitor only knew — if he would only say the right thing to meet what he himself thinks in connection with the etching, he'd be so carried away he might give it to him, making a "bluff" that it is only a duplicate. *Marc Antonios*, etchings by the famous engraver Marc Antonio Raymondi (1487 or '88–1539). *Festina lentè*, literally *hasten slowly*, make haste slowly, *i.e.* "hold on."

2. The interest in the poem is not only literary but psychological.

V. Summum Bonum, p. 1295

Published in *Asolando*, Browning's last volume, which appeared on the day he died, Dec. 12, 1889. The remaining short poems discussed here were in the same volume.

1. *Summum Bonum* means the chief good, the greatest or ultimate good. It is a matter much discussed from classical times — what is the Summum Bonum?

2. Browning's poem is an intense love-poem, concentrating the excellence and beauty of things into the smallest compass and then putting forward something that beats all that, viz. love — the truth and trust

"In the kiss of one girl."

3. "The bag of one bee" is, of course, the bag in which the bee carries the honey to his hive.

4. The poem is a good example of climax, everything in it culminating upon the last line,

"In the kiss of one girl."

VI. SPECULATIVE, p. 1295

Published in *Asolando*, Dec. 12, 1889.

1. There's always speculation as to the question: If the personalities of human beings do endure beyond death, what are the conditions under which they exist? If, say, the good are in Heaven, what is that place or state like?

2. Browning answers that for him a piece of the old life on earth will be good enough, exactly as it was. It will be Heaven if only he and Mrs. Browning can meet and part no more.

3. It seems as if the meaning of the lines would be plainer with a different punctuation. Yet as they stand no one will miss their meaning. The language is very condensed. The first stanza says that "others may need new life in Heaven" — everything new — Man with new mind, Nature with new light, Art with new opportunity and new fulfillment. In sharp contrast to all this desire for newness is Browning's prayer that past minutes of the earth may return and remain, that the old earth-life may come back ("enmesh us" — notice the word), even as it was before with him and Mrs. Browning. For the last lines are addressed to her, and this poem is out of the depths of Browning's love for her.

4. It is better not to begin to say what I think of this poem, lest I say too much. I do not want to say extreme things. The poem focuses in one point of light several of the fundamental thoughts which we see so often in Browning's writings. You will not find many things of ten lines quite equal to it in your rummaging the literatures of the world. Just for the sheer joy of going over the words again, here it is:

Others may need new life in Heaven —
Man, Nature, Art — made new, assume!
Man with new mind old sense to leaven,
Nature — new light to clear old gloom,
Art that breaks bounds, gets soaring-room.

I shall pray: "Fugitive as precious —
Minutes which passed, — return, remain!
Let earth's old life once more enmesh us,
You with old pleasure, me — old pain,
So we but meet nor part again!"

VII. REPHAN, pp. 1314, 1315

Published in the same volume with the two poems just discussed.

1. The matter of the poem is very akin to the centre of Browning's way of looking at things. His belief in the good of imperfection and the good of struggle makes him keenly sympathize with the being on whom all the perfection of the star of the god Rephan grows stale and cloying and who is stirred by a desire to struggle through failure, suffering, and sin toward higher things and is therefore told by a voice,

"Thou art past Rephan, thy place be Earth!"

2. Browning himself says in a note (printed at bottom of first column, p. 1314) that the poem was "suggested by a very early recollection of a prose story by the noble woman and imaginative writer, Jane Taylor, of Norwich." As Dr. Berdoe[1] and the editors of the Globe Edition point out, Jane Taylor lived at Ongar, not Norwich. Her story was entitled *How it Strikes a Stranger* and was in vol. I of her work entitled *The Contributions of Q. Q.* Naturally enough, Browning's poem bears very little resemblance to Jane

[1] *Browning Cyclopædia*, ed. 1912, p. 383.

Taylor's story which he recalled across so many years. He got from it only the word Rephan and a suggestion.

VIII. REVERIE, pp. 1315–1317

Published in the same volume as the preceding.

1. The poem is a Confession of Faith that somewhere, sometime, we shall come to self-fulfillment in harmony with the universe, — strong buoyant faith that when rightly seen Power and Love are one.

a. The life of the race is repeated in epitome in the life of the individual. Therefore, the life of the individual and the life of the race shall both find fulfillment according to the same law:[1]

> "I for my race and me
> Shall apprehend life's law:
> In the legend of man shall see
> Writ large what small I saw
> In my life's tale: both agree."

b. Naturally progress will be from near to far, from within outward, — this is the key to the fulfillment:[2]

> "How but from near to far
> Should knowledge proceed, increase?
> Try the clod ere test the star!
> Bring our inside strife to peace
> Ere we wage, on the outside, war!"

So he looks into his own life which has been lived in the presence of infinite Power which seems at strife with Love.

c. Anyway, life is a great becoming, a splendid adventure:[3]

> "Then life is — to wake not sleep,
> Rise and not rest, but press
> From earth's level where blindly creep
> Things perfected, more or less,
> To the heaven's height, far and steep."

[1] P. 1315, ll. 74–78. [2] P. 1315, ll. 84–88. [3] P. 1317, ll. 53–57.

d. And Browning believes that, although Power in the universe is so evident and Love dimly shown, yet at last we shall find that "Power is Love:" [1]

> "I have faith such end shall be:
> From the first, Power was — I knew.
> Life has made clear to me
> That, strive but for closer view,
> Love were as plain to see."

2. The poem opens and closes with the same high note, that "there shall dawn a day," no matter when, no matter where — a day when Power shall have its way in him and he will find life's fulfillment.

IX. Epilogue, p. 1317

This is the Epilogue to *Asolando*, the volume published the day Browning died.

1. It has been well said that even if Browning had known that these were to be his last words to the world, he could not have given a more intimate and more vital message than in *Reverie* and in this *Epilogue*.

2. The *Epilogue* especially is a pointblank confession of what he is and how he wishes to be esteemed. When he is dead, people will very likely mistake him, as is usually the case. How will his friends think of him, when they are thinking in the night? Are they going to think of him as lying low, imprisoned by Death, and pity him? In life he was none of "the slothful, the mawkish, the unmanly" — he was not like "the aimless, helpless, hopeless." Nay rather, he was

> "One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
> Never doubted clouds would break,

[1] P. 1317, ll. 63–67.

Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake."

And he wants them to think of him "in the bustle of man's worktime," as not dead but alive, — struggling and progressing in the unseen world as he did here. Notice the contrast between thinking of him "at the midnight" and "at noonday," in the "sleeptime" and in the "worktime."

3. A word is needed as to the last stanza: "the unseen" to be greeted with a cheer is Browning after death. This is plain from the pronoun "him" which refers to "the unseen." "Breast and back as either should be," breast and back each in its place, not with breast where back should be, *i.e.* not turned to retreat. "Strive and thrive! . . . Speed, — fight on etc." all after *cry*.

4. The poem is quite beyond praise. It has too much reality in it to be subject to treatment as literature. It provokes the finest admiration for the man who wrote it. One evening just before his last illness Browning was reading the proofs of *Asolando* with his sister and daughter-in-law. And when he read the third stanza of the Epilogue, he stopped and said: "It almost looks like bragging to say this, and as if I ought to cancel it; but it's the simple truth; and as it's true, it shall stand." [1] It will be a sad day for any of us when we do not feel like bowing in the presence of such a personality as speaks through this Epilogue.

[1] Substance of incident related in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of Feb. 1, 1890. Browning's words are quoted exactly as reprinted from the *Gazette* by Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopædia*, ed. 1912, pp. 153, 154.

VI

THREE OF THE LONGER POEMS NOW STANDING AMONG THE DRAMATIC ROMANCES

THOUGH now standing under the head of *Dramatic Romances*, no one of these three poems was originally published in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* of 1845.[1]

I. THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN, pp. 353–356

Published in *Dramatic Lyrics*, 1842.

1. Its subtitle is *A Child's Story*, and there is added *Written for, and inscribed to, W. M. the Younger, i.e.* written for William Macready, Jr., son of the great actor William Macready.

2. People who think Browning is so hard have never read *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, or, if they've read it, don't know it is Browning's. Children read it and enjoy it hugely, know it by heart and repeat it with gusto.[2] But when I say, "Well, Browning's not so hard — see how the children enjoy his *Pied Piper*," then comes the exclamation, "Oh! did Browning write *The Pied Piper?*"

3. A few notes:

a. Pied, variegated with spots of different colors. See description of his coat (v) and his scarf (vi).

b. Hamelin (German *Hameln*) is a town of 20,000 people (1905), in the province of Hanover, 33 miles by

[1] See explanation at the beginning of Chapter IV

[2] It has been a pleasure to the writer to hear it. No doubt some of the children of the reader's acquaintance can repeat it.

the railroad southwest of the city of Hanover, in Prussia. It is situated on the river Weser, at the point where the Hamel flows in. Browning is mistaken when he says,

"Hamelin Town's in Brunswick."

It is not far from the borders of Brunswick and has been at times in its history under the protection of the dukes of Brunswick, but it is in Hanover.

c. The legend is found in various works, *e.g.* (1) Richard Verstegen, *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities concerning the English Nation*, 1605,[1] (2) Nathaniel Wanley, *The Wonders of the Little World, or a General History of Man*, 1678.[2]

d. A piper named Bunting, for the promise of a sum of money, freed the town from rats, by playing on his pipe while they followed until he led them into the Weser and they were drowned. The townsmen then refused to pay him. So he went away again, playing, followed by the children, 130 in all. He led them to a hill called the Koppelberg (or Koppenberg, as some spell it) whose side opened and they entered and disappeared. The event is recorded in inscriptions in the town, and was long regarded as historical. "For a considerable time the town dated its public documents from the event."[3]

e. The year was 1284 (June 26). Browning has July 22, 1376 (p. 356, ll. 31–33). How he got the date wrong by almost 100 years, no one seems to explain.

[1] Published, Antwerp, 1605; reprinted, London, 1673. Its author's real name was Richard Rowlands and he was born near the Tower of London, but many of his works were published under the name or initials of Richard Verstegen.

[2] Also eds. 1774, with revision and index, 1806–07, 2 vols., with additions by Wm. Johnston.

[3] *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th ed., Cambridge, 1910, vol. XII, p. 876, art. *Hameln*.

f. The town of Brandenburg, some 37 miles southwest of Berlin, and the town of Lorch in Würtemberg have tales of such an event as having taken place at each of them. There are similar Persian and Chinese legends. We recognize a widely diffused legend, fastened upon different localities.[1]

g. P. 354, l. 35, *Cham*, now usually written *khan*, — word for prince, chief, governor — here used for the head ruler of Tartary.

l. 37, *Nizam* (*Nizam-ul-Mulk*, Regulator of the State), the title of the native sovereigns who, since 1719, have ruled Hyderabad, an extensive territory in the interior of southern India. The territory is often called Nizam's Dominions.

4. The versification of the poem is rapid and full of variety. There are many of those grotesque rhymes with which Browning likes to decorate his humorous pieces. The drollest of them are: "Trump of Doom's tone" and "painted tombstone" (p. 354, ll. 14, 15), "river Weser" and "Julius Cæsar" (ll. 67, 69), "pickle-tub-boards" and "conserve-cupboards" (ll. 77, 78), "by psaltery" and "drysaltery" (ll. 82, 84), "rare havoc" and "Vin-de-Grave, Hock" [2] (p. 355, ll. 5, 6).

5. The humor is very rich. It is all so good that it seems out of order to quote a sample, but the Mayor's eye is perhaps a little better than any of the other droll descriptions:

> "Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
> Than a too-long-opened oyster." [3]

[1] Some trace the origin of the legend to the Children's Crusade of 1212. This might be the thing which led to the legend's being adapted and attached to various places in Germany, but not the origin of the legend itself. In favor of there being some basis of fact in the case of Hameln, the article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* points out that the Koppelberg is not one of the imposing elevations by which the town is surrounded, but a low hill barely enough to hide the children from sight as they left the town.

[2] Two kinds of wine arrayed at the end of the list, to make the rhyme.

[3] P. 353, ll. 90, 91.

II. The Statue and the Bust, pp. 372–375

Published in vol. I of *Men and Women*, 1855.

1. In the Piazza dell' Annunziata in Florence stands an equestrian statue of Grand Duke Ferdinand I (Ferdinand de' Medici, born about 1549, succeeded his brother Francesco I as Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1587, died 1609. He was a younger son of Cosimo the Great, 1519–1574). The statue is by the great sculptor John of Douay [1] (1524–1608), one of his finest works. It faces the *old* Riccardi Palace, now called the Antinori Palace. This is, of course, the palace mentioned in the first line of the poem and was where the Riccardi lived whose bride looked out and saw Duke Ferdinand ride by. It should not be confused with the palace (p. 372, ll. 54–74, especially ll. 57–62) [2] in the Via Larga (now called the Via Cavour), where the feast was held that night, at which the bridal pair were guests. (Lines 63–71 describe the Duke receiving them.) That was Duke Ferdinand's own residence.

2. The story is that Ferdinand had the statue so placed because in that palace of the Riccardi lived the lady he loved, kept a prisoner by a jealous husband.

3. The bust seems to be Browning's invention. He admits there's none there now (p. 374, l. 48).

4. The *crime* (p. 372, l. 59) was the usurpation of the authority of the Republic by Cosimo de' Medici (Cosimo the Elder, 1389–1464), referred to in lines 61 and 62 as the murder of the Republic. *Robbia's craft* (p. 374, l. 28, cf. l. 46), the kind of work in enamelled terra-cotta origi-

[1] P. 374, l. 61. He is usually called Giovanni da Bologna, John of Bologna.

[2] That was the Medici Palace and was sold in 1650 to the Riccardi, and so is now called the Riccardi Palace. But in the days of Ferdinand I, of course, the Medici lived there and the Riccardi lived in what was then the Palazzo Riccardi, viz. the palace toward which this statue faces.

nated by Luca della Robbia (who died in 1463) and carried on by the family for a hundred years. The last well-known artist of the family, Girolamo della Robbia, died in 1566. In the last line, *De te, fabula!* literally, *concerning thee, the story! i.e.* the story is concerning you, it hits your case, there's a moral in it for you.

5. The verse-form is *Terza Rima,* which originated with the Troubadours, and was first extensively used by Dante (1265–1321) in the *Divine Comedy* and to some extent by Boccaccio (1313–1375) after him. It was introduced into England by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503–1542) or by the Earl of Surrey (1516–1547, their poems published together in Tottel's *Miscellany,* 1557), and has been variously adapted and experimented with by Sir Philip Sidney, Samuel Daniel, Lord Byron, and others. Mrs. Browning has used it for her *Casa Guidi Windows.* The finest piece of *Terza Rima* in English is Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind.* Browning does not handle it nearly so well as Shelley.

6. The point in this poem has been already referred to in our discussion of Browning's characteristics. The Duke and Riccardi's wife had decided to elope, to commit the sin. According to the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 5 : 27, 28), they were already guilty of it, having formed the purpose in their thoughts. But instead of carrying it out, they delayed days, weeks, years, still cherishing those desires. And their souls shrivelled. They were put to the test and failed. It tested them as surely as if it had been a good thing they delayed to do. Whatever has become of them, Browning is sure they do not see God nor have any place with those who "have dared and done:"

> "Only they see not God, I know,
> Nor all that chivalry of his,

The soldier-saints who, row on row,
Burn upward each to his point of bliss
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had burned his way thro' the world to this."[1]

III. "CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME," pp. 375–378

Published in vol. I of *Men and Women*, 1855.

1. This poem was written in Paris in one day, Jan. 3, 1852, and was not revised after that.

2. It was suggested, as Browning's note at the head of the poem indicates, by a line of Edgar's song in Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

a. As you remember, Edgar, to save his life, is disguised as a madman and acts the part. Pouring out a mass of incoherent nonsense in Act III scene IV, he sings at the end of the scene this snatch of a song:

"Child Rowland to the dark tower came,
His word was still, — Fie, foh, and fum,
I smell the blood of a British man."

The great dissimilarity between the first line and what follows has suggested to several critics that Edgar, in his pretending to be crack-brained, throws together bits of two different songs. This is probably the case. The first line is evidently from a ballad older than Shakespeare's time and probably familiar to his audience, but it has not yet been elsewhere discovered. Traces of the other two lines, or rather of the "Fie, foh, and fum, etc.," have been found.[2]

[1] P. 374, ll. 79–84.

[2] See Furness, Variorum Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Philadelphia, 1880, pp. 201, 202 (same pp. in 10th ed. 1908). In spelling *Child Rowland* most editors follow the early editions, but I have seen one or two recent editions with the spelling *Childe Roland*.

b. The first line of Edgar's song caught Browning's imagination. Undoubtedly what struck Browning was the word "came" — *arrived, accomplished what he set out to do.* This chimed in with Browning's nature and his doctrine of sticking, with iron determination, to what you undertake. So he let his fancy loose on conditions preceding and attending the knight's arrival at the Tower.

c. Browning's poem, then, should be weaned entirely from Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Edgar's pretended madness, except for the slightest contact, viz. this: the line of an old song in Edgar's mouth fired Browning's imagination.

d. "Child," when used as in this song (and generally spelled *Childe* when so used), was applied to young knights and young men of noble birth. See Spenser's use of it in *The Faerie Queene.* Cf. Byron's styling himself "Childe Harold" in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.*

3. "Childe Roland" is Sir Roland, the strongest and bravest of Charlemagne's paladins.

a. Charlemagne (*Charles, the Great*), King of the Franks, was crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, in St. Peter's Church in Rome, on Christmas day, in the year 800.

b. Around him and his knights has grown up a mass of legend, (as around King Arthur and his knights, only with very much more historical basis).

c. Most famous of all Charlemagne's knights is Roland, who commanded the rear guard of the army in the retreat from Spain in the year 778 and, when the rear guard was cut off, lost his life in battle at Roncesvalles (French, *Roncevaux*), in Navarre. So much is historical. The legends gathering about the event have made an epic, the famous *Chanson de Roland*, or Song of Roland, pre-

served in Old French, — immensely enlarging, of course, his actual prowess.

d. The adventure referred to in the ballad from which Edgar sings a scrap is some one of the other legends which became attached to the name of Roland — some adventure of his earlier years, the quest of the Dark Tower.

4. Browning's poem has to be considered entirely apart from any historical basis. It is sheer imagination. The poem is in the mouth of the knight whose adventure is related. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that Browning meant to imply that the adventure came to a successful issue, for if reaching the Dark Tower brought him into something which was the last of him, how could he be relating thus much of what befell him? We get the impression from the poem that it is some time afterward, perhaps years after, that Roland is relating how he finally reached the Tower. He does not go on with any account of what happened after he blew his horn. "That," as Kipling would say, "is another story." The thing on which Browning's imagination works is simply the last afternoon of the journey and the arrival before the Tower. The earlier wandering is referred to, but only because of its bearing on this last afternoon.

5. The circumstances are quite plain:

a. The quest of the Dark Tower was a quest to which knights, one generation after another, had devoted themselves (stanzas VII, XXXIII, XXXIV). (For a famous example of such quests, compare the quest of the Holy Grail.)

b. There existed some information as to the general marks of the region in which the Tower was situated and a description of the immediate surroundings of the Tower (stanza III, stanza XXX), also a description of the Tower

itself by which it could be recognized (stanza XXXI). But the *direction* in which to search seems to have been lost, for the knight in the present adventure had wandered world-wide (stanza IV).

c. Knights who devoted themselves to the quest of the Tower were called "the Band" (stanza VII), *i.e.* when a knight had sworn to take up this quest, he had joined "the Band."

d. Why some knights so devotedly gave themselves to this quest is not explained. The aspect of things as the poem closes would seem, however, to justify the idea that it was with purpose to avenge some great wrong. (We will discuss the close of the poem later.)

6. The following comment may be of use in reading the poem:

Stanza I — *on mine*, my eye — his eye watching the working of his lie on my eye; *pursed*, puckered up; *scored*, made notches in (derived from keeping the score by cutting notches in a stick); *one more victim*, Roland thinks this fellow's business is simply to send men astray.

Stanza II — *'gin write*, begin to write; *dusty thoroughfare*, the cripple sits at the edge of the travelled road, from which the knight turns off.

Stanza III — The knight has reached the region in which the Dark Tower is situated.

Stanza IV — *what with*, somewhat with, partly with (*what* used adverbially), — rather old-fashioned but still heard occasionally.

Stanzas V, VI, and VII are really all one sentence. There is no conclusion to the sentence until stanza VII. So there should be something other than a period at the end of stanza VI.

Stanza VI — *scarves* (plural of scarf), *staves* (plural of

staff), to be used at the funeral, a part of the ceremony and display of the old days.

Stanza VIII — *its estray*, viz. the knight himself, now turned astray on the plain.

Stanza IX — *pledged to the plain*, having decided to travel the plain and having begun to do so, having committed himself to it.

Stanza X — *ignoble nature*, natural things of such poor quality; *cockle*, common name for several different weeds, growing in such a place as this it would be darnel (genus *Lolium*) or cockle-bur (genus *Xanthium*); *spurge*, harsh weeds of the genus *Euphorbia; treasure-trove*, money or other valuables found hidden in the earth or anywhere, the owner not being known, — talk about weeds' growing, a bur would have been like finding a treasure.

Stanza XI — *It nothing skills*, it makes no difference, there's no use trying; *calcine*, to convert into powder by heat or into a substance that can be readily crushed (for the idea of heat connected with the end of the world, see 2 Peter 3 : 10).

Stanza XII — *bents*, spears of stiff wiry grass; *pashing*, striking, crushing.

Stanza XIII — *devil's stud*, devil's stable, — *stud*, a collection of horses, also the place where they are kept.

Stanza XIV — *colloped neck*, a collop is a chunk of flesh, — this horse's neck is made up of bunches or lumps as if of collops put together, or as if an effort had been made to chop it up into collops.

Stanza XVI — *Not it*, it can't do what he expected of it (cf. preceding line).

Stanza XVII — *durst*, archaic for dared, still used to some extent; *faugh!* exclamation of disgust; *a parchment*, on which is written the crime for which he is hanged; *his*

own bands, the men who had supported him in his insurrection, bands of revolutionists or malcontents.

Stanza XVIII — *a howlet*, an owlet.

Stanza XIX — *bespate*, spattered; *spumes*, bits of foam or froth.

Stanza XXI — *which*, the river.

Stanza XXII — *a plash*, puddle.

Stanza XXIII — *cirque*, circle; *mews*, enclosure, place of confinement (plural of *mew*, a cage for hawks, a coop for fowls); *brewage*, anything produced by brewing, a malt drink as beer or ale.

Stanza XXIV — *furlong*, 40 rods, one-eighth of a mile; *Tophet's tool*, tool from hell. Tophet was in the valley of Hinnom, near Jerusalem, — the valley where the sewage and filth of the city were dumped and where fires were kept burning to consume offal and carcasses. In its earlier history, this valley was a place of altars to Molech and of abominable rites.[1] The Greek word *Gehenna* (the only word in the New Testament which is properly translated hell) is from the Hebrew *Ge-Hinnom*, valley of Hinnom. Naturally enough, Tophet and Gehenna came to be symbolic of torment or destruction.[2] The word Tophet is not often heard in conversation among us except in such expressions as "hotter than Tophet."

Stanza XXV — *stubbed*, covered with stubs, *i.e.* stumps left from broken trees. The same piece of ground is described in these three lines. Its history is plain from its appearance: once it was a piece of woods, next it became

[1] See Jer. 7:31; 32:35; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6, and Josiah's action in regard to the matter 2 Kings 23:10.

[2] Cf. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. I, ll. 404, 405:

> "The pleasant valley of Hinnom, Tophet thence
> And black Gehenna called, the type of hell."

a marsh, and now it is "mere earth desperate and done with." The same ground is described in the last two lines of this stanza: *within a rood*, a quarter of an acre; *rubble*, rough broken stones.

Stanza XXVII — *Apollyon*, the angel of the bottomless pit (Rev. 9:11); *dragon-penned* (Latin *penna*, a feather), having feathers like those on a dragon's wing. Cf., in *The Ring and the Book*:[1]

"Twitch out five pens where plucking one would serve."

Stanza XXVIII — *with such name to grace*, if one may call the "ugly heights and heaps" by such a name as mountains.

Stanza XXX — *scalped mountain*, mountain having a bare top, like the head of a man who has been scalped by an Indian; *nonce*, the once, the one occasion, (chiefly in *for the nonce*), — *at the very nonce*, at the very moment, at the critical moment.

Stanza XXXII — *Not see?* repeating someone's suggestion or a thought which he knows may be in his listeners' minds: "Maybe it was getting so dark that you couldn't see the Tower until you were almost on it;" *heft*, same as *haft* (both from O. E. *hæft*), hilt, handle.

Stanza XXXIII — *Not hear?* similar to *not see?* in stanza XXXII.

Stanza XXXIV — *slug-horn:* What Browning has in mind is a short crude sort of bugle, but the word *slug-horn* is really a corruption of *slogan*, rallying-cry, and the use of it (older than Browning) as if it signified a *horn* is entirely erroneous. Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* has "*slug-horn*, a short and ill-formed horn of an animal of the ox kind, turned downwards and stunted in growth,"

[1] *Count Guido Franceschini*, p. 736, l. 17.

and one might argue that *slug-horn* to blow on is that word, with a history similar to the use of *horn*. But the use of *slug-horn* for *slogan* (with no sense of horn) shows plainly that such use as Browning's here is a mistake. The punctuation which places anything except a period after *blew* in the last line is surely wrong and is prompted by a misinterpretation. "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came" is not what he blew, but simply a summing up of the adventure, up to this point. Of course, in a certain sense that blast on the horn was a summing up of the adventure, and in that sense only can it be argued that the horn seemed to say, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came."

7. The account, then, which the knight gives of his reaching the Tower:

The knight relates that he had been for years on this quest, in a "whole world-wide wandering," and now his hope had "dwindled into a ghost," when he came to where by the highway sat a repulsive cripple. The knight evidently had long ago lost his horse, for now he was on foot. Exhausted and discouraged, he asked the cripple the way to the Dark Tower, and the cripple indicated that it was in yonder ominous tract of country. The knight, nothing doubting that the cripple was lying, in fact was posted there to misdirect travellers and get them into trouble, nevertheless turned as directed. He had not hope enough left to bear the "obstreperous joy success would bring." He does not care what comes next, only if there can be some end. He will go on and become one of that glorious company who have given themselves to this quest and have failed. He is like a sick man very near to death, who seems indeed dead and hears them speak of him as dead and hears the discussion of details about his funeral, and desires only that he may not come out of his trance

and embarrass them. So this knight has so long been counted one of "the Band" devoted to the quest of the Dark Tower, so long has it been prophesied that he will fail, that just to fail like the rest seems the best thing he can do. The only question with him is whether he is fit to join that company of those who, in spite of all high endeavor, failed.

And so he turns, "quiet as despair," into the path across the dreary plain. The desolation is great, even at first, and increases in repulsiveness as he goes on. The sun of the late afternoon shoots out a "grim red leer" at him. He loses sight of the highway whence he came, and could not go back. There is nothing to do but to go on. The plain is so barren that a bur on it would be finding a treasure. Nature seems to have given up as impossible making anything of this place. As he goes on, there are some thistle-stalks with chopped heads, some dry wiry grass, some dock-leaves all bruised up, — the whole as if trampled by a brute's hoofs. Further on, he comes where the ground has been flooded and now is left covered with a coating of mud which looks as if it were "kneaded up with blood" underneath and through which the thin dry blades of grass prick up "as scant as hair in leprosy." The only living creature in sight is a ghastly specimen of a horse, fit only to be turned out of the devil's stables as of no further use.

So repulsive is everything external that the knight tries to get courage from his own heart by thinking of other days and his valiant friends. "One taste of the old time sets all to rights," — will help him now in spite of what is around him. So he thinks of Cuthbert, handsome fellow, and his affectionate way, — until he comes to Cuthbert's disgrace — one night, whatever it was he did, shattered

the confidence and friendship. There is no comfort nor encouragement in thinking of Cuthbert. Well then, think of Giles, he was "the soul of honor." Think of him as standing there just as he stood ten years ago when knighted. A brave man and honorable, "What honest man should dare (he said) he durst." But just here the encouragement that was arising from thinking of Giles is dispelled by Giles' end: some revolt Giles had headed, some outlawry, — and the mental picture of the brave young fellow turns to the picture of him hanged as a criminal. And so it goes on — no comfort in memories, as Roland plods on. He finds no encouragement within himself, and he brings his mind back to "this present," this dismal plain, on which the presence of an owlet or a bat would be something to be appreciated.

He has gone on, thinking, not noticing much his surroundings for a while, and now is surprised by coming upon a little river flowing across the plain, not sluggishly as would seem fitting to the place (you see, he has drawn nearer the hills without noticing it and there is more reason for current than he supposes), but frothing and foaming spitefully as if fit for the hot hoof of the devil. There are alders and willows on its banks and dipping into it. The knight wades through, reaching his spear ahead of him to find holes and avoid getting in too deep. So gruesome is the whole thing, that he would not be surprised to find his spear tangled in a dead man's hair or beard, or even to set his foot upon a dead man's face. Once, when spearing ahead of himself thus, something cried or squealed, which he rigidly makes himself understand was probably a water-rat struck by his spear, but to his overwrought nerves it seemed for the moment a baby's shriek.

Reaching the other bank of the river, he thinks for a

moment that it may prove better, but is disappointed. If possible, its grotesque hideousness exceeds what he saw before. And its hideousness is of another sort, showing evidence of human or fiendish cruelty: an awful struggle of some sort, human or bestial, has taken place, and passing by the marks of that, he comes to a torture-machine. Further on, he comes to land "desperate and done with," and then to soil that is revolting to look on and to the one tree, a "palsied oak" which has a grinning cleft in it. This is all wearing hard on the man, exhausted as he is with wanderings and hardships.

His eyes fixed on the hideousness immediately around him, he is convinced that he is arriving nowhere, that there is naught to point his footstep further. The thought has hardly formed itself in his mind, when he feels his cap brushed by the wing of a great black bird who looks as if he might be "Apollyon's bosom-friend." Looking up and after the bird, the knight perceives that he is among the hills, or mountains if you may call them so. He is surprised at how they have stolen upon him, the fact being, of course, that he has been so absorbed in the desolation and the repulsive sights near at hand and so absorbed in his own thoughts that he has walked into the hilly part, not noticing it in the dusk of evening. He does not see how to get clear of these hills now (he has no idea of turning back). But his mind is working as a mind does when half-recognizing something without conscious effort. What his mind is working over is the marks for identifying the location of the Dark Tower, coupling these that he has held in memory for years with what the eye takes in from these hills. Suddenly, with a flush of heat over his whole body, the realization comes upon him that this is the place he has been seeking. With that, instantly he recognizes

the marks, the two hills on the right like two bulls crouching with locked horns, and the "tall scalped mountain" on the left, — and in the middle the Dark Tower itself, answering exactly to the description treasured in the mind of every knight who has sought it. It must be the one, there is no other like it in the world. The recognition of the whole thing has come to him as he was almost running upon it, just as a sailor gets no warning of an unseen reef until his ship strikes it. To the suggestion that he didn't see because of the gathering darkness and so came close to the Tower before knowing it was there, the knight answers that the sunset kindled up again[1] "through a cleft" in the hills (or perhaps a cleft in the clouds). And as that sunset brightened and showed him the scene, there lay the hills like giants at a hunting when the game is cornered and they look on to see the death — "Now stab and end the creature" — only, in this case the knight himself being the creature in such desperate straits. Someone suggests that maybe he didn't hear anything to attract his attention. To this the knight answers that "noise was everywhere." This was, of course, the noise in his own brain, the turmoil of the realization that he had reached what so many worthier than he had sought in vain. The tremendous excitement and nervous tension which came with that realization make him seem to hear tolled in his ears the names of all the lost adventurers who have gone on this quest, with praise of each one's strength and prowess, and success in other endeavors, — yet each was "lost, lost!" Of course, it is the history of the quest, brooded over so much, now rushing through his mind. It seems to him as if this moment, tolling the names of

[1] The writer has several times seen sunsets die down and then kindle again so that they were very much brighter 15 or 20 minutes later.

those knights and their fate, knells "the woe of years." And in the tremendous tension and excitement of the moment, not only does he seem to hear their names and their fate tolled in his ears, but his heightened imagination pictures them all as ranged along the hills ("There they stood," — *they* being the lost adventurers), looking at him now, at him who has reached the Tower, to see how he will conclude the quest, — grimly he puts it "to view the last of me," *i.e.* to see how he will behave himself in the last struggle, which he thinks will very likely cost him all. They form in his imagination "a living frame for one more picture" ("living frame" in apposition with "they . . . ranged along the hill-sides"). The "one more picture" is to be the knight himself doing what he is about to do, the picture of what's going to happen when he blows his horn. How great the strain and how heightened his imagination may be judged from the fact that he not only sees the adventurers lost on this quest watching what he will do, but it is "in a sheet of flame" he sees them and knows them all. And yet, under such circumstances, exhausted as he is and with all those of the past who have tried and failed looking down upon him, with all that may come to pass in the next minute, *dauntless he sets the slughorn to his lips and blows.*

"What happened then?" is the question so many ask. Why, but one thing could happen. Sir Roland has sought so long, and now has found the Tower and *will do what he came to do.* That blast on his horn is *a challenge*, — not simply a blast blown to celebrate his having found the Tower. The setting for the whole — those faces along the hillsides "a living frame" — for what? For the picture of the battle which takes place when, in answer to his horn, the inhabitants of the Tower rush out on him. He is

"dauntless" — in view of what? Dauntlessly faces what's going to happen the next minute after he sets that horn to his lips. Exhausted in body, worn and harassed in soul, with a consciousness of all that is at stake, he does not delay nor hesitate, but dauntless blows his challenge. This is exactly in the spirit of Robert Browning. But to tell what comes after would be "another story." Browning started to describe Roland's reaching the Dark Tower. And having seen him reach it, Browning leaves the story with the simple summary which started him to writing it: "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.*"

8. The poem as a work of art:

a. The poem is fascinating. This fascination is due to (1) the wonderful descriptions in it, (2) the constant sense that the story corresponds to something in our lives, and (3) the desperate determination and perseverance of the knight.

b. The poem contains many stanzas of exquisite poetry, and some stanzas which cannot by any stretching of the word be said to be poetry at all. (1) To justify our remark as to exquisite poetry, we have only to cite such phrases as (in stanza IV)

> "my hope
> Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
> With the obstreperous joy success would bring,"

the details of the simile wrought out in stanzas V, VI, and VII, the "quiet as despair" in stanza VIII, the whole of stanza XV, the lines in stanza XX

> "Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
> Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
> Of mute despair,"

and those in stanza XXVII

> "And just as far as ever from the end!
> Nought in the distance but the evening, nought
> To point my footstep further!"

and in stanza XXX

> "Burningly it came on me all at once,
> This was the place!"

and the whole of stanzas XXXII, XXXIII, and XXXIV. (2) To justify the other part of the remark, *i.e.* as to the unpoetic passages in the poem, we need only appeal to such a weak and ineffective line as that at the end of stanza XIV,

> "He must be wicked to deserve such pain,"

very evidently put in simply to finish out the stanza, and to such things as, in stanza XXI,

> "It may have been a water-rat I speared,
> But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek,"

and in stanza XXII,

> "Toads in a poisoned tank,
> Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage."

This last example is an extreme one, — bare, realistic, with no touch of idealism. And without idealism there is no art of any kind — no poetry, of course. There are many other passages in the poem not so extreme as this but belonging in the same category. In stanza XIII we read

> "As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
> In leprosy,"

and in stanza XXVI,

> "Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
> Broke into moss or substances like boils."

These are almost as extreme and as lacking in any possible claim to be considered poetry. (3) It should be added, however, that these extremely realistic descriptions do, whether poetry or not, accomplish what Browning wanted

to do, viz. give us a vivid sense of the repulsiveness and hideousness of the plain over which the knight goes.[1]

9. The poem would well repay study from the standpoint of psychology. The working of the exhausted knight's mind, in view of the whole situation as he starts across the plain, is interesting, and especially the state of mind he has gotten into by the time he fords the river. But still more significant is his account of his experience before the Tower. Natural enough is the fact that the crucial moment brings vividly before his mind the whole history of the quest, — a phenomenon to be classed with that reported of persons drowning, that sometimes a man's whole life rushes past his mind's eye in a brief space of time.

10. What did Browning mean by the poem?

a. First of all he meant to write a piece of dramatic narrative, and he certainly did it. Anyone who reads the poem a few times will not soon forget it.

b. And Browning did *not* mean a detailed allegory. All such interpretations are unjustifiable. Browning's own statement made to Dr. F. J. Furnivall[2] was that the poem is not an allegory. Nothing could be more absurd and further from Browning's poem than Dr. Berdoe's undertaking to say[3] that it is "a picture of the Age of

[1] To the remark as to the unpoetic passages in "*Childe Roland*," Prof. Charles B. Wright and Mrs. John H. McCrackan have, in conversation with me, made strong objections. Prof. Wright's argument is that the passages cited as unpoetic are necessary to the artistic effect of the whole, and that therefore the poem as an artistic unit justifies these passages, and that it is unjust to isolate them and say that they are lacking in poetic art. Mrs. McCrackan's argument is that these passages represent sublimated hideousness, and that this is as truly a form of idealism as is sublimated beauty, and that therefore these are examples of poetic art. Both these arguments should be given due weight in connection with the above paragraph.

[2] The London Browning Society's *Papers*, Part III, p. 21, quoted by Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopædia*, ed. 1912, p. 103.

[3] Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopædia*, pp. 104, 105.

Materialistic Science," [1] and in particular a condemnation of medical research by means of inoculating lower animals.[2] Nor is the blast of the horn "a warning to others." [3] All the best words in the last stanza lose their meaning unless the blowing of the horn is a defiance. (See our discussion earlier in this lecture.)

c. But Browning is not a man who could put forward a thing so graphic and stirring as this without some meaning below the mere words. And the meaning is plain: it is *unfaltering loyalty to an ideal.* (Read Prof. Royce's *Philosophy of Loyalty* and see how loyalty to something, anything, gives life a meaning.) Unfaltering loyalty to an ideal and iron determination to do what we undertake to do — these will carry us through. The desperate tenacity of the knight in going on and the desperate valor, no matter how extreme his exhaustion, at the end — these are of the soul of Robert Browning.

d. While the poem, then, is in no sense an allegory, it is a vivid story of a man's sticking to his quest in the midst of all dismal and repulsive surroundings and meeting the climax of hardship and suffering undismayed. It is very like human life at its hardest and blackest, — nothing to cheer us inside or outside of ourselves — nothing to do but to face it grimly and go on — and like enough on top of all that is hard and dismal will come the most desperate struggle — yet to meet it with a dauntless soul. That is what is in Childe Roland's coming to the Dark Tower.

[1] Called by Berdoe, p. 105, also "Atheistic Science."

[2] This latter part Berdoe hangs upon the words,

"Toads in a poisoned tank,
Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage."

It seems to be inoculation rather than vivisection he means by phrases "gloat over their animal victims" and "experimental torturer."

[3] Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopædia*, p. 105 end.

VII

FOUR OF THE MAJOR POEMS IN MEN AND WOMEN

THESE four poems were published in *Men and Women*, 2 vols., 1855, and still stand in that division of Browning's works. *An Epistle* and *Bishop Blougram's Apology* were originally in vol. I, *Cleon* and *One Word More* in vol. II.

I. AN EPISTLE CONTAINING THE STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE OF KARSHISH, THE ARAB PHYSICIAN, pp. 441–445

Browning had the rare ability to think outside of the atmosphere in which he lived, *i.e.* to set himself outside of Christian civilization, free himself from it to an unusual degree, and see how things look to one brought up in a different environment. This ability is much needed. In our estimate of pagan customs, *e.g.* the holding of gladiatorial shows in the arena, we are too quick. "Put yourself in his place" and see. In our estimate of other religions we need the same quality. A little realization of their point of view would save us from many an absurd snap-judgment. Browning's ability to do this is strikingly shown in several poems: *e.g.* in *Caliban upon Setebos*, a primitive intelligence trying to think out the mysteries of things; in *Cleon*, a Greek pagan poet and his attitude toward life and toward St. Paul's preaching of the Christian faith; but most strikingly of all in *An Epistle*.

1. In the eleventh chapter of the Fourth Gospel (usually called the Gospel according to St. John) is an account of

the death of Lazarus of Bethany, near Jerusalem, and his being raised from the dead by Jesus of Nazareth. That is all.

2. Now one of the strongest desires of humanity is to know something about what becomes of a man when he is dead. Is he extinct? If not, is he unconscious and will wake some day? Or is he conscious? If so, where is he? what does he see? what does he hear? what does he do? does he know what's taking place on earth? and so on.

3. Now, in the case of Lazarus, here was a man supposed to have lain dead four days. He could answer these questions, if he was really dead and raised to life again. Yet not a solitary syllable is related as to anything he said about his condition or experience between his death and his resurrection, nor how this affected his view of life. The questions have been asked thousands of times — everyone of you have heard some of them: How did he act? What did he say? How did life look to him?

4. Robert Browning is the only one I know of who has had the audacity to imagine how Lazarus acted and how he looked at life.[1] Browning has done it with great skill.

a. His observer is Karshish, an Arab physician, skilled in the science of the time. And Browning, with absolute consistency, does not impute to him any of the medical science of our time, but the medical science of centuries gone by, — with charms, queer dosage, and so on. The date is consistently laid just before the siege of Jerusalem which ended in its destruction in the year 70 A.D.[2]

[1] Browning does not undertake to imagine what Lazarus said about his experience while his body lay in the tomb, but somewhat of Lazarus' experience is implied in his estimate of values after his resurrection.

[2] P. 442, ll. 1–3; p. 444, ll. 10–14. The Jews revolted in 66 A.D. Vespasian began the siege of Jerusalem, but was made Emperor in 69, and his son Titus concluded the siege in the year 70.

b. The Arab physician is travelling for information — so common a way to learn when books were scarce — one of the best means of education anyway. He writes letters to an older physician named Abib, his teacher,[1] telling of his observations. This is now the twenty-second letter since he started on his travels:[2]

"And writeth now the twenty-second time."

c. With great naturalness his adventures and especially many curious observations, such as would be interesting to Abib, are woven in, — his hardships in travel, his being beaten by robbers, his being treated as a spy, his observation of fevers, epilepsy, scalp-disease, his information as to gums, herbs, charms, extract[3] of spiders, and so on. If Browning, from a sense of delicacy, had left out these, we'd have no such atmosphere of reality as hangs round this Arab doctor's letter. It is a source of considerable wonder that this effect can be produced. It is accomplished partly by the technical nature of the details given, partly by the touching on his adventures showing the troubled condition and dangers of the country, and partly by the informal style of the writing.

d. It soon becomes evident that Karshish has something on his mind which interests him more than these other professional observations. This finally comes out apologetically, and he frequently tries to switch off from it to his other observations, but cannot let it alone.

e. The thing that interests him is a case he has found here in Bethany, "one Lazarus a Jew,"[4] who believes that

[1] P. 441, ll. 66 sqq. [2] P. 441, l. 78.

[3] When Karshish breaks off (p. 442, l. 23) it is not plain whether he meant to drop the spiders into wine (his most available form of anything alcoholic) and make a *tincture*, or boil them in water and make a *decoction*.

[4] P. 442, l. 83. The name is not given for some time after Karshish begins to tell of the case. This is in keeping with the informal style of his letter and also with his attitude toward this case.

he was dead and raised to life again. Karshish looks at the case from the medical standpoint — the medical science of his time: (1) He considers it "a case of mania — sub-induced by epilepsy." [1] (2) The one who brought him out of his trance was "a Nazarene physician of his tribe." [2] (3) This was accomplished

> "by the exhibition of some drug
> Or spell, exorcization, stroke of art," [3]

unknown to Karshish. (4) This Nazarene physician unfortunately has been put to death many years ago at the instigation of a mob,[4] and so Karshish cannot talk the matter over with him.

So far, so good. No cause for reticence in writing of such a matter.

f. But that is not all. Karshish, in spite of himself, is interested in *Lazarus' way of looking at life.* Of this he cannot help giving some details,[5] and these are very striking.

g. But the thing he most hesitates to report is *Lazarus' view of his countryman* who, he believes, raised him from the dead. It seems to the man of science almost profane.[6] This Lazarus believes [7] that Jesus of Nazareth was God dwelling in human flesh, who bade him "Rise" and he did rise.

h. Karshish apologizes again for giving this case, throws

[1] P. 442, ll. 54–56. [2] P. 442, l. 75. [3] P. 442, ll. 57, 58.

[4] P. 444, ll. 33–49, especially ll. 37, 38. Karshish (ll. 42, 49) explains that the death of the Nazarene took place at the time of the earthquake and supposes that his inability to stop the earthquake was what brought to a climax the anger of the people against him. Cf. Karshish's own explanation of the portent of that earthquake (ll. 43–45) with the circumstances as related in Matt. 27: 50–53. Nothing could better show Browning's ability to keep the standpoint of his observer.

[5] P. 442, l. 82–p. 444, l. 32, the main part of the letter.

[6] P. 444, ll. 57, 58, 64. [7] P. 444, ll. 51–67.

in a few other medical observations, explains the circumstances under which he met the man, and closes his letter.

i. Then in a postscript, the conception Lazarus has of Jesus burning in the physician's mind, the new world of thought opened by it staring him in the face, he adds the statement of what the Incarnation according to the terms stated by Lazarus would mean to mankind if it could be true, what it does mean if it is true: [1]

> "The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?
> So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too —
> So, through the thunder comes a human voice
> Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!
> Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
> Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
> But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
> And thou must love me who have died for thee!'"

5. *An Epistle* is altogether a remarkable piece of imagination, giving very truly (1) how Christ's deeds must have struck a man of education when he first came in contact with the report of them, and (2) how the claims made for him by his followers must have struck the educated men of those days outside of that circle.

[1] P. 445, ll. 1–8. Mayor's general remark should be quoted here, because he cites this passage as an illustration of the quality to which he refers. Joseph B. Mayor, *Chapters on English Metre*, 2d ed., Cambridge, 1901, pp. 217, 218:

"I hardly know whether it is fancy or not, but to me there is no poetry which has such an instantaneous solemnizing power as that of Browning. We seem to be in the company of some rough rollicking Silenus, and all of a sudden the spirit descends upon him, the tone of his voice changes, and he pours out strains of sublimest prophecy. To use his own figure, a sudden breeze dispels the smoky haze of the crowded city, and in a moment we are conscious of the 'crystal silentness' of snow-crowned Alps towering over our heads. I will close with the concluding lines of a poem which has always seemed to me to have this effect in a remarkable degree, *The Strange Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician.*"

6. The point of the whole poem is too evident to need discussion:

a. We say we believe in things unseen and eternal. We say we believe that spiritual things are worth while and that material things are not of so great consequence. We say we believe this life is a part of an endless life and that death cannot destroy us. But do we live as if we believed these things?

b. Taking Lazarus, a man supposed to have seen behind the veil, and who therefore is taken as one who knows, *realizes*, all these things which we profess to believe, Browning shows how this man looks at life — how any man would look at life, if things unseen and eternal were actually real to him. This Lazarus has a different scale of values from that which most of us have. To Lazarus, things that so disturb others are of small consequence: the coming of a Roman army to destroy Jerusalem, the passing of a mule with a load of gourds — all the same to him.[1] Nothing is of consequence to him except what pertains to personality: a look from his child, showing something of the child's soul, stirs him deeply.[2] This Lazarus knows what eternal life means, and says[3]

> "he will wait patient to the last
> For that same death which must restore his being
> To equilibrium."

Knowing the reality of the unseen and eternal around the seen and transient,

> "He holds on firmly to some thread of life
> Which runs across some vast distracting orb
> Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
> Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet —
> The spiritual life around the earthly life."[4]

[1] P. 443, ll. 31–34. [2] P. 443, ll. 34–50.
[3] P. 443, ll. 90–92. His experience has done its work on his soul.
[4] P. 443, ll. 63, 65–68.

7. A few notes:

P. 441, ll. 59 sqq. The salutation is after the manner of Greek and Latin letters, familiar to us, but is confused a little by the large number of phrases arrayed in apposition. It runs: (l. 59) "Karshish . . . to Abib" (l. 65), and exactly parallel to that is (l. 73)

"The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home."

The verb of the first part of the paragraph, if any is needed, is "sends greeting" which appears in the second part. "Sends" governs also "three samples etc." The subject of "writeth" (l. 78) is "the vagrant Scholar."

l. 60, *not-incurious: curious*, having an inquiring mind, eager for knowledge — *incurious*, not curious — *not-incurious*, not not-curious; he makes a very modest claim for himself. Cf. also the preceding line.

l. 75, *snakestone*, any hard substance used as a remedy for snake-bites, whether applied externally or pounded up and taken internally. Samples of snakestone from Ceylon, examined by Prof. Michael Faraday (born 1791, died 1867), were found one of them to be of animal charcoal, one of chalk, one of some vegetable substance.[1]

l. 79, *were brought*, in his last letter before this.

P. 442, l. 3, *Vespasian*, born 9 A.D., made Roman Emperor 69, died 79; *his son*, Titus, who took Jerusalem and destroyed it 70 A.D.

l. 5, *balls*, eyeballs.

ll. 10–14, the description of the distance from Jerusalem to Bethany is not elegant, but it is very like a physician, probably quite like a physician of 1800 years ago.

l. 15, *travel-scrip*, travelling-bag: *scrip*, a small bag,

[1] See Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopædia*, ed. 1912, p. 160. Berdoe cites Tennant, *Ceylon*, 3d ed., I, 200.

wallet, satchel (cf. Matt. 10: 10 and often in the Gospels, version of 1611).

l. 16, *Jewry*, place where Jews live, here the Jews' country, Judæa, — used with a touch of contempt.

l. 17, *viscid*, sticky; *choler*, bile.

l. 18, *tertians*, intermittent fevers occurring every other day, — called *tertian* (from Latin *tertianus*, of, or pertaining to, the third — *tertius*), because in the days when the name arose it was the custom to count both ends of a period of time. Cf. the N. T. writers' counting Fri. afternoon to Sun. morning as three days and using the phrase "on the third day" in referring to the resurrection of Christ. Cf. also "after eight days" (Jn. 20: 26), meaning a week later. .

l. 19, *falling-sickness*, epilepsy.

ll. 20 sqq., *there's a spider here etc.* The use of spiders to some extent in medical practice is ancient and had a long vogue. It is not nearly so revolting as many things in the therapeutics of bygone centuries. What Karshish was about to say was how to make a tincture, or else a decoction, of these spiders as a remedy for epilepsy, but it is too valuable a secret to risk. The particular spider referred to is probably the Zebra spider (*Epiblemum scenicum*). It belongs to the tribe of *Saltigradæ*, or leaping spiders (including especially those that lie in wait and leap on their prey). This tribe is of the *Wandering group*.[1] See Dr. H. McCook, in *Poet-Lore*, vol. I, p. 518.

l. 24, *runagate*, fugitive, vagabond; *this*, the letter he is writing.

ll. 25, 26, *His service*, in carrying the letter, is to pay me for treatment I've given him, viz. blowing a sublimate up

[1] Walcknaer divides spiders into five principal groups, distinguished by their habits.

his nose to help his ailing eye; a *sublimate* is any substance refined by melting, vaporizing, and then condensing, as is done *e.g.* with sulphur, iodine, camphor, or in the production of benzoic acid.

l. 30, *gum-tragacanth,* sold usually in dry flakes and employed for mucilage and similar uses in place of gum-arabic. It is procured from several species of shrubs of the genus *Astragalus.*

l. 32, *porphyry,* hard fine-grained rock, some varieties red, some purple, some green — usually with crystals of feldspar or quartz interspersed, — used, on account of its hardness, for such things as mortars.

l. 33, *in fine,* literally *in the end, i.e.* in conclusion, to sum it up.

l. 35, *Zoar,* a city near the south end of the Dead Sea.

l. 42, *tang,* a point, projection, sting; also, a flavor, taste.

l. 44, *the Man,* Lazarus, as presently comes out.

l. 53, *wit,* in the earlier and broader sense — mind, intellect, understanding.

l. 54, *subinduced,* literally *under-induced, i.e.* caused or started indirectly.

l. 57, *exhibition,* in the medical sense — "the act of administering as a remedy."

ll. 60 sqq. The idea that disease is due to possession by an evil spirit is ancient and widespread. Cf. the healing miracles in many instances in the New Testament.

l. 64, *conceit,* in the more general sense — concept, idea.

l. 71, *or . . . or,* either . . . or.

l. 76, *'Sayeth,* he sayeth. Cf. our use of *says* without a subject, in reporting a man's remarks.

l. 77, *diurnal,* daily — in the sense here of being daily met with.

l. 78, *figment,* something invented or imagined.

l. 82, *after-life*, the life which Karshish finds Lazarus living, after his experience of death and resurrection, or after this "figment" got fastened in his mind.

l. 84, *sanguine*, in the literal sense — full-blooded, (Latin *sanguis*, gen. *sanguinis*, blood).

l. 87, *as*, as if.

P. 443, l. 3, *premise*, present as introduction, explain beforehand.

l. 5, *inquisition*, keen searching inquiry.

ll. 28–50. The condemnation of Lazarus' point of view and actions is entirely from Karshish's point of view and comes from his testing those actions by his own scale of values. This he admits when he adds in l. 37 parenthetically "Far as I see." All the words "witless," "preposterously," "wrongly," are to be taken with the qualification — *as far as Karshish understands*.

l. 61, *a match* cannot, of course, be in our everyday sense or Browning has made an absurd slip. It must be taken in a more general sense of any means of starting a fire or setting off an explosion.

l. 62, *Greek fire*, the use of liquid fire is as ancient as Assyria (as is shown by representations on the monuments), *i.e.* such inflammable things as sulphur, tar, petroleum, nitre, were thrown on the enemy. The mixtures used later were no doubt more carefully made and more effective. Regular *Greek fire* is not known until the siege of Constantinople 673 A.D. Although something of the sort was undoubtedly known in the first century, the particular combination which became famous as Greek fire was not known then and Browning has made a mistake in having Karshish write the phrase.

l. 63, *He*, Lazarus.

l. 69, *that*, the spiritual life; *this*, the earthly life.

P. 444, l. 37, *leech*, physician.

l. 71, *blue-flowering borage*, the common borage (*Borago officinalis*), a plant which was for many centuries highly esteemed and supposed to possess qualities producing cordial and exhilarating effects; *Aleppo*, a city in north Syria, now capital of the Turkish vilayet of Aleppo.

l. 72, *nitrous*, containing nitre, *i.e.* potassium nitrate, saltpeter; *It is strange*, his thoughts slipping back to Lazarus.

l. 89, *ambiguous*, there's doubt as to what the Syrian may do with the letter — three things are mentioned, all of which are equally likely.

P. 445, l. 2, *so*, if God has become incarnate; *were*, subjunctive *would be.*

l. 3, *so*, same as in l. 2; *voice*, typographical error in this word in Globe Ed.

l. 5, *it*, a face like yours: the words of the line are really addressed to "Face, my hands fashioned," so we ought to say a face like yourself.

l. 6, *conceive*, misprinted in Globe Ed.

l. 9, *He*, the one who, Lazarus says, raised him from the dead.

II. Bishop Blougram's Apology, pp. 456–467

Browning gives us here a very interesting discussion. Much that is said, however, in the vein of defending superficial success and compromise with convictions and lack of out and out frankness with the public, is unlike Browning's genuine attitude. Browning himself has safeguarded this point by entering a caveat at the end:[1]

[1] The appendix (p. 467, ll. 30 sqq.) to the monologue is added on purpose to guard against our thinking that Browning supposed he had really justified a man in Bishop Blougram's attitude. Notice chiefly ll. 39–64.

"For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke.
The other portion, as he shaped it thus
For argumentatory purposes,
He felt his foe was foolish to dispute."

And so on. The chief excellence of the poem is the discussion of Faith and Doubt, and all this smacks of deep sincerity and is evidently a statement of considerations which have been of comfort in Browning's own life.

1. His speaker in Sylvester Blougram [1] (no historical person), a bishop in the Roman Catholic Church [2] in England [3] in Browning's own day.[4] Browning purposely chooses a Roman Catholic to be his mouthpiece in this philosophizing about Faith, because in demands for sheer Faith all branches of the Catholic Church so far exceed any Protestant Church — in all the Catholic systems there is so much more which the faithful are expected to believe, and some of it (*e.g.* Transubstantiation) is more staggering to Faith than is almost any Protestant doctrine.

2. The reader of the poem understands the circumstances quickly. The Bishop has had a literary chap named Gigadibs [5] to dine with him on Corpus Christi Day,[6] and over the wine the Bishop speaks frankly about his faith

[1] P. 467, l. 31 gives his full name.

[2] There are many passages which prove that Bp. Blougram is a Roman Catholic, e.g. p. 456, l. 80; p. 459, ll. 64–70, 79, 80; p. 460, ll. 45, 46; p. 461, ll. 5–7; p. 464, ll. 21, 43–47.

[3] P. 456, ll. 22–25; p. 465, l. 34; p. 467, ll. 3–19, 31, 32, 69–71; and the whole atmosphere of the monologue. Blougram has, of course, been much in Rome (p. 456, l. 64).

[4] As is shown by references to contemporary men and events, *e.g.* p. 456, l. 71; p. 460, ll. 49–54, 79; p. 462, l. 67; p. 464, ll. 20, 21, 60, 61.

[5] P. 456, l. 32; p. 467, ll. 3, 34.

[6] P. 456, l. 53. *Corpus Christi* (literally, the Body of Christ) is a festival in honor of the holy Eucharist and is observed on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. Trinity is the next Sunday after Whitsunday, or Pentecost, which is 50 days after Easter.

and his doubts and makes an *apologia* for his position in life. Browning has frequently thrown in remarks to be in keeping with these circumstances, *e.g.* the parenthesis on p. 457 (ll. 67, 68):

> "(try the cooler jug —
> Put back the other, but don't jog the ice!)"

3. Browning's Bishop speaks well, with wealth of fancy and precision of expression. His wit is keen, and has exactly the ring of a prelate wearied with the pomp and show of the Church, yet knowing the worth of all this and speaking of it in genial terms, though sometimes not very seriously. Some of his characterizations of things will be long remembered by the reader: *e.g.* anyone acquainted with the struggle between science and theology will appreciate this:[1]

> "cosmogony,
> Geology, ethnology, what not,
> (Greek endings, each the little passing-bell
> That signifies some faith's about to die)."

4. Gigadibs represents the man of the world, with his self-satisfied air and his patronizing, if not condemnatory, attitude toward the clergy. The Bishop goes right to the centre of this attitude at once[2] and very discriminatingly, in pointing out that, while Gigadibs despises Bishop Blougram, he feels none the less highly honored to have dined with him and will have it to boast of years afterward. Gigadibs does not speak in the poem, but his reception of Blougram's remarks is frequently shown in what Blougram next says. Gigadibs is rather bored with Blougram's talk and does not feel its full import. This also is true to life. The description of how Gigadibs acted is good:[3]

[1] P. 463, ll. 84–87. [2] P. 456, ll. 32–70, especially ll. 40 sqq.
[3] P. 467, ll. 30, 31, 34–36.

"Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour
Sylvester Blougram, . . .
With Gigadibs the literary man,
Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,
And ranged the olive-stones about its edge."

5. Browning's sympathy with the Roman Catholic Church is one of the most interesting things in his nature. Extreme Protestant as he was, the mystic in him responded profoundly to much that he found in the Catholic Church, his æsthetic sense felt strongly the appeal of the artistic side of the Church's worship, and he honored the genuine piety which he knew in so many members of the Roman Communion. Protestant cavillers and controversialists should remember that Robert Browning, after many years in Italy in the midst of the Roman Catholic Church, makes the finest figure of nobility and self-sacrifice in his poems a young Roman Catholic priest, Giuseppe Caponsacchi in *The Ring and the Book.* It is not surprising, then, that in *Bishop Blougram's Apology* we find Browning stating the case of a doubting Roman Catholic Bishop and defending his view of life and his accepting the honors and emoluments of his office as well as a genuine ecclesiastic could do it, — and probably much in the same line in which a bishop of such mental make-up would have to speak, if he "made a clean breast of it" like this.

6. The figure that runs through the poem, often recurring, is of life as a voyage and our adapting our luggage to our cabin-space.

7. But the chief interest in *Bishop Blougram's Apology* is the discussion of Faith, and the principles laid down affect Protestantism as much as Catholicism — are, indeed, universal and apply inside or outside of any form and all forms of church organization. It is hard to begin

to quote without quoting great sections of the poem. Some of the points in the argument are these:

a. Sheer unbelief is as hard to keep as sheer belief is. Blougram proposes that we throw faith overboard: now being sheer unbelievers what have we? We now have unbelief disturbed by belief, just as we had belief shaken by unbelief:[1]

> "All we have gained then by our unbelief
> Is a life of doubt diversified by faith,
> For one of faith diversified by doubt."

Half a page preceding these lines should be quoted in connection with them.

b. If you begin to believe, there's no drawing the line:[2]

> "some way must be, —
> Once feel about, and soon or late you hit
> Some sense in which it might be, after all.
> Why not 'The Way, the Truth, the Life?'"

c. On the other hand, if you begin to cut away things which you count non-essential as matters of faith, begin to clear off "excrescences," it is difficult to stop:[3]

> "First cut the Liquefaction,[4] what comes last
> But Fichte's clever cut at God himself?"

d. Faith is the positive attitude of mind without which nothing is accomplished. Faith is constructive and dynamic, and the great things done in the world have

[1] P. 458, ll. 59–61. [2] P. 458, ll. 44–47. [3] P. 464, ll. 60, 61.

[4] The Liquefaction of that portion of the blood of St. Januarius preserved in a crystal phial in the cathedral of Naples. The miracle is alleged to take place on special occasions, and regularly in public on St. Januarius' Day, Sept. 19th. Cf. p. 464, ll. 43–47. See discussion of the miracle in art. *Januarius* by Herbert Thurston, S. J., of London, in the *Catholic Encyclopædia*, New York, 1910, vol. VIII, pp. 295–297. Browning here uses belief in it as an illustration of crass credulity.

been due to faith — faith in *something*. Browning gives many illustrations: *e.g.* a man is crazy who thinks unbelief can make a Napoleon:[1]

> "Be a Napoleon, and yet disbelieve —
> Why, the man's mad, friend, take his light away!"

Faith is the fire:[2]

> "fire and life
> Are all, dead matter's nothing, we agree:
> And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,
> The fact's the same, — belief's fire, once in us,
> Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself."

e. Morality is rooted in faith in some sort of invisible things. Morality cannot be accounted for solely as having been an evolution from expediency. And few who put themselves down as sheer unbelievers are willing to live consistently with that profession.[3]

f. Faith is a sound instinct:[4]

> "You own your instincts? why, what else do I,
> Who want, am made for, and must have a God
> Ere I can be aught, do aught?"

g. We are not altogether helpless in the matter of whether we believe or not. Will and desire have some part in it. And Bishop Blougram considers that a man may choose to such an extreme as to say:[5]

> "I absolutely and peremptorily
> Believe!"

h. But doubts will come. And doubt is not wrong nor inconsistent with faith:

> "If you desire faith — then you've faith enough."[6]

[1] P. 461, ll. 34, 35.
[2] P. 462, ll. 47–51.
[3] P. 465, ll. 44–70.
[4] P. 465, ll. 75–77.
[5] P. 459, ll. 7, 8.
[6] P. 463, l. 39.

Faith unmixed with doubt is impossible:[1]

"Pure faith indeed — you know not what you ask!"

It could not be borne.

"With me, faith means perpetual unbelief
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe."[2]

8. The poem has woven into it some of the threads of Browning's best philosophy:

a. The good service done by evil in the world:[3]

"And that's what all the blessed evil's for."

b. The main thing — "to wake, not sleep:"[4]

"I say, faith is my waking life:
One sleeps, indeed, and dreams at intervals,
We know, but waking's the main point with us,
And my provision's for life's waking part.
Accordingly, I use heart, head, and hand
All day, I build, scheme, study, and make friends;
And when night overtakes me, down I lie,
Sleep, dream a little, and get done with it,
The sooner the better, to begin afresh.
What's midnight doubt before the dayspring's faith?"

c. The good of the struggle within a man, set forward in the grotesque and quite unforgettable picture of God pulling upward on the man and Satan pulling downward — and so he grows (we might almost say they stretch him by their pulling):[5]

"No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet — both tug —
He's left, himself, i' the middle: the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!
Never leave[6] growing till the life to come!"

[1] P. 463, ll. 52 sqq. [2] P. 463, ll. 71–73. [3] P. 463, l. 59.
[4] P. 459, ll. 8–17; ll. 18–28 should also be quoted, they continue the same line of thought. [5] P. 464, ll. 10–15. [6] leave off.

9. If I may quote just one passage more, — this time to illustrate the picturesqueness with which Bishop Blougram carries forward his argument, let it be this one. After proposing that we divest ourselves of faith and see how we come out, he goes on:[1]

> "How can we guard our unbelief?
> Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
> A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
> A chorus-ending from Euripides, —
> And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
> As old and new at once as nature's self,
> To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
> Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
> Round the ancient idol, on his base again, —
> The grand Perhaps!"

III. CLEON, pp. 467–471

We were speaking of Browning's ability to put himself in the place of one who had grown up in an entirely different civilization, and of *An Epistle* as an illustration of this. Another illustration of the same power is found in *Cleon*.

1. This also is a letter.

a. It is written by an imaginary poet (who is not only poet, but sculptor, painter, philosopher, and musician).[2] Browning, at the head of the poem, begins a quotation from St. Paul's address on the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17 : 28) : "As certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." The words given by Paul, "For we are also his offspring,"[3] are from the *Phœnomena* of Aratus,

[1] P. 458, ll. 30, 32–40. [2] P. 468, ll. 33–53.

[3] The words in a slightly different form are found in Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* (4th century B.C.), where we read: "For thine offspring are we; therefore will I hymn thy praises and sing thy might forever." Paul's using the phrase "As certain also of your own poets have said" may easily

a Stoic poet of Soli[1] in Cilicia, in the third century B.C. It is not likely that Browning means to imply that he thought Paul quoted from an unknown poet for whom Browning invents the name Cleon. But Browning takes this phrase to introduce a letter purporting to be from a Greek poet, just as Paul uses the words to introduce his quotation from Aratus: *i.e.* Paul cites one poet, Browning cites another, who writes this letter.

b. This letter from the poet Cleon is to a king Protus "in his Tyranny." This is in the earlier Greek sense:[2] τύραννος (*turannos*), an absolute ruler of one of the Greek states, kind and good very likely, but king in an unlimited monarchy; thus we read of Pisistratus (born about 612 B.C., died 527 B.C.), "tyrant of Athens," a mild and beneficent ruler, and of the "tyrants" of other Greek cities; "his Tyranny," then, means his absolute sovereignty, or it may mean the territory ruled by such a king. Browning's poem does not indicate in what part of Greece his king Protus rules.[3]

c. This king is a patron of art and has sent Cleon rich gifts and a congratulatory letter, and has asked him certain questions. The nature of his congratulations and the nature of his questions we readily learn from the poet's answer.

imply that he knew the sentiment to have been expressed by more than one Greek poet. It is possible that the name Cleon for his poet was suggested to Browning by the name Cleanthes.

[1] Not a native of Paul's own city Tarsus, as is so often stated, but of Soli (or Pompeiopolis, as it was called after being rebuilt by Pompey the Great), a city on the coast southwest of Tarsus, in the same province of Cilicia in Asia Minor.

[2] The use of *tyrant*, however, meaning a ruler unjust and despotic, arose already in the later days of the ancient Greek civilization.

[3] The reference to the phare (p. 468, l. 41) proves nothing, because it is only a general word for lighthouse. The reference to the Pœcile of Athens proves nothing except that Protus had never seen it (see ll. 43, 44).

d. The king's letter has just been handed to Cleon, and he is writing his reply as the master of the king's galley unloads the gifts.[1]

e. The time is in the first Christian century, during the missionary preaching of Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ. This is evident from the close of the letter[2] which shows that the king has asked Cleon about Paul and that Cleon knows Paul has preached somewhere in the vicinity of his island. Paul was undoubtedly martyred near the close of the reign of Nero Cæsar, who committed suicide June 9th, in the year 68. Paul's death was some time 64 to 67 A.D. This letter belongs to a time at least ten years earlier, *i.e.* when Paul was in Greece and neighboring parts of the Empire, in the years 50–55 A.D.[3]

f. Cleon is a pagan Greek, with all the learning, sense of art, and contempt for the Jews[4] which a cultured Greek would have.

g. He is writing "from the sprinkled isles" of Greece,[5] "that o'erlace the sea" like lilies, — probably the Cyclades, a group in the Ægean Sea, east of the southern end of Greece.

2. The only words that need explanation are:

P. 468, l. 37, *epos* (Gk. ἔπος), an epic poem.

l. 41, *the phare*, lighthouse. The word is derived from

[1] P. 467, ll. 78–83. Notice the description (p. 468, ll. 1–8) of how one of the slaves brings to Cleon wine in a cup which the king himself has used.

[2] P. 471, ll. 55–71. Paul himself has not preached on that island, but has been near enough so that some of his converts have preached there.

[3] In having Cleon at this period address a letter "to Protus in his Tyranny," Browning forgets the historical situation. As a matter of fact there were no sovereigns in any part of Greece in the first century A.D., but the whole country was a province of the Roman Empire, — the province of Achaia.

[4] P. 471, ll. 61–67. Paul is to him "a mere barbarian Jew."

[5] P. 467, ll. 74–76.

Pharos, the name of a rocky island off the city of Alexandria, Egypt. Alexander the Great, who founded the city 332 B.C., connected the island with the mainland by a mole[1] (called the *Heptastadium,* because it was seven stadia long — about four-fifths of a mile), thus providing two harbors. Along this mole a street was later constructed, making Pharos a suburb of Alexandria. On the northeast point of the island the famous lighthouse stood for 1600 years. It was built chiefly by Ptolemy I (died 283 B.C., founder of the Greek dynasty in Egypt) and completed by his son Ptolemy Philadelphus (Ptolemy II, born 309, died 247 B.C.). It was hardly a lighthouse in our modern sense, but a great beacon-tower, with a fire kept constantly burning on it. The Greek word *pharos* (φάρος), then, came to be used for any such tower.

l. 43, *Pœcile* (also in English *Stoa Pœcile,* and *Poicile;* Gk. ποικίλη, *many-colored,* or in full ἡ στοὰ ποικίλη, or ἡ ποικίλη στοά, *the many-colored portico*), the famous "porch," or covered colonnade, in Athens, where Zeno, founder of the Stoics, taught and from which the Stoics derived their name. It was decorated with paintings,[2] one of the artists being Polygnotus of Thasos (5th century B.C.). It cannot be that Browning is ignorant of Polygnotus' work in the Pœcile and accredits the whole to Cleon. He probably means that there were paintings there by artists whose names we do not know, among whom he places his Cleon. But the language (ll. 43, 44) "The Pœcile . . . is mine too" sounds as if Cleon claimed all the paintings there as his work.

[1] This mole still remains and has been increased by alluvial deposits until it is a broad neck of land.

[2] P. 468, ll. 43, 44: "o'er-storied its whole length . . . with painting," *i.e.* covered its whole length with stories told in pictures.

l. 50, *combined the moods.* The various sequences of tones and semitones in the diatonic scale — the variety depending upon where you begin — are called *moods*, or *modes* (usually *modes*). Thus, *e.g.*, on a piano key-board, taking the key of C (*i.e.* omitting the black keys), if we begin with D, the octave D to D gives the *Dorian mode*, E to E the *Phrygian*, F to F the *Lydian*, G to G the *Mixolydian.* The *modes* furnish great variety in the relative position of the tones and semitones, and a corresponding variety in the effect of the music, some being bright, some sombre, and therefore different modes being suitable for different subjects and occasions. The Greek music was the basis on which the music of the Christian Church was developed, and the principles of Greek music have persisted in the music of the Church. In the earlier history of Church music, four modes were recognized, called *authentic modes*, and these are thought to have been adopted directly from Greek music. Later, four *plagal modes* were added, and still later others have been added and some made by combining some already accepted. The development of Church music was gradual and never the work of one man nor of a few, but the chief stages in it are associated with the names of Ambrose (born about 340, died 397), Bishop of Milan, and Pope Gregory the Great (born 542, made Pope 590, died 604). The Gregorian music is still extensively used — is, indeed, now officially the music of the Latin Church. The modes in it are usually designated by numbers, as *e.g.* the *first mode*, the *second mode*, the *sixth mode.* In modern music only two modes are recognized, the Major and the Minor.[1]

[1] These, although spoken of as the Major and Minor *key* and Major and Minor *scales*, and although they may involve sharps and flats, are essentially *modes*.

P. 471, l. 58, *Paulus*, Paul.

l. 59, *Christus*, Christ.

ll. 59, 69. This echo of rumors in regard to Paul, confusing him with Christ, gives, no doubt, a faithful representation of the confusion in the minds of most of the people of Achaia and other provinces, — knowing only vaguely and indifferently of the new doctrine and its chief promulgator.

3. The poem is very gracefully written. It is not necessary to choose illustrations out of its almost uniform excellence, but perhaps these lines are the best:

P. 467, l. 83, "Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee."
P. 468, l. 32, "Within the eventual element of calm."
P. 471, l. 49, "Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death."

4. The main points in the poem, in answer to the king's congratulations and questions:

a. P. 468, ll. 33 sqq. The king has congratulated Cleon on how much he has accomplished. Cleon's answer is: It is even so. He has done all these things. Cleon's mind represents the growth of culture. He is superior to the ancients, his mind is more composite and therefore greater than the simpler minds of the past. They were each great in one line and in his own line each of the great in the past may have easily exceeded Cleon. But he is capable of appreciating the best each one of them has done. At the same time he has wider interests and more varied activity.

b. P. 469, ll. 53 sqq. Has not Cleon therefore attained the crown and proper end of life? How does he face death? Having gained so much and having given so much to enrich the life of the world, can it not be said of him that he does not die? No, says Cleon. He sees that relentless progress is a law in all around him. But the

individual is lost. The progress is accomplished by the individual's adding himself, his life and work, to the world's life and losing himself. But to say that this is immortality is juggling with words. There is small comfort for the individual in the progress of the race, if the individual soul perishes. The individual has not really achieved immortality. To survive incorporate with the life of humanity, even to live as an individual in the memory of men, is not really to be alive, — and Cleon shrinks from it, he loves life so much.

c. P. 470, ll. 77 sqq. But, insists the king in his letter, such a poet or artist lives in his works. Cleon repeats that this is not life. The king has tripped upon a word. Knowing how and showing how to live are very different from actually living. Knowing what joy is is different from feeling joy. Writing of love is not the same as loving and being loved. If Sappho and Æschylus live still, as the king says they do, let them come and do what a living man can do. No, no, the idea which the king has so generously expressed,[1] that he cannot face death as cheerfully as Cleon can because he leaves no works in which to live as Cleon does — this is exactly contrary to the case. Cleon's "fate is deadlier still." For Cleon, after all his intensity of life out of which these works were made, himself will be dead, while his works will be alive to mock him.[2] Cleon says he has thought of the possibility of personal immortality, a future state with joy enough to satisfy the "joy-hunger" which we have here. Then

[1] See quotation from his letter, p. 469, ll. 63–75. Cf. p. 471, l. 26.

[2] The mockery consists in this situation: that the works will still have their part in the life of men, while the personality which gave them being will be extinct. This passage (p. 471, ll. 27–41) is the most poignant in the poem. Surely it is out of Browning's own love of life and his recoil from being blotted out.

death would be only emancipation. But he judges it is not a fact, or else Zeus would have revealed it to us.

d. P. 471, ll. 54 sqq. Farewell and postscript. The postscript refers to the king's question as to Paul and his preaching. It gives the cultured Greek's attitude. The king's servant has a letter for Paulus, if he can find him,— doubtless to ask the same old questions mankind has always been asking.

IV. One Word More, pp. 472–474

This was the epilogue to *Men and Women*. Those two volumes contained, as published, 50 other poems[1] and this epilogue — hence usually spoken of as 51 poems. *One Word More* is really a dedication of the two volumes to Mrs. Browning. At its head stands *To E. B. B.* (Elizabeth Barrett Browning) *1855*. It is signed *R. B.* at the end.

1. *The Metre.*

a. One Word More is written in *trochaic pentameter*, *i.e.* five-foot lines, the normal foot being of two syllables with the accent on the first syllable. Thus *e.g.* the first line is regular:

Thére they | áre, my | fíf-ty | mén and | wóm-en.

b. The usual English blank verse, or "heroic" verse, is *iambic* pentameter, *i.e.* each line of five feet, the normal foot being of two syllables, accented on the second syllable. Thus *e.g.* a regular line from *Cleon*:[2]

They gíve | thy lét | ter tó | me é | ven nów.

(1) The five-foot iambic blank verse is that in which the greatest poetry in the English language is written, — the

[1] The larger part of them now distributed in the collected works under other headings, as we have already pointed out. See Browning's note, p. 472, bottom of 1st column.

[2] P. 467, l. 78.

major works of Shakespeare, Milton, Tennyson, Browning, and many others. (2) But the regular line, with five feet and every other syllable stressed, would become intolerably mechanical and monotonous. Hence there have arisen, for the sake of melody and flexibility, a great variety of substitutions [1] in the line.

c. Similarly, in handling five-foot trochaic, Browning practices some substitution, but not with anywhere near the freedom which he and other masters use in handling five-foot iambic.

d. One Word More is the largest piece of five-foot trochaic in the English language. Lines of five-foot trochaic are found: *e.g.* in Tennyson's *Vision of Sin* and his *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington.* But this of Browning's is the only piece of any considerable length in this metre in English. Perhaps p. 473, l. 76, may refer to the uniqueness of the metre: [2]

"Lines I write the first time and the last time."

e. It appears that in Bohemian poetry, the usual five-foot line is trochaic, just as in English the usual is iambic. At least that is what I understand Omond to mean when he says: [3]

"In Bohemian literature, I understand, *falling* rhythm is as natural as *rising* with us; the metre of *One Word More* is normal, that of *Paradise Lost* exotic."

[1] This matter of the substitution of other feet for the iambic, along with the other technicalities of this verse, is too long to discuss here. The reader is referred to any standard works on English Metre, but especially to Mayor's *Chapters on English Metre* (2d ed. 1901), where there is a careful inquiry into the usage of the best masters.

[2] The whole passage (section XIII), however, probably refers to the nature and general style of the poem.

[3] T. S. Omond, *A Study of Metre*, London, 1903, p. 64. Omond throughout discards the usual terminology, and calls feet "periods" — those accented on the first part "falling rhythm," accented on the latter part "rising rhythm."

2. *Notes.*

a. Two of the footnotes in the Globe Edition need a little modification. Both refer to Rafael's sonnets:

P. 472, l. 33, "Rafael made a century of sonnets."

Note 2, "There is no reason to believe this to be the fact."

P. 472, l. 54, "You and I will never read that volume."

Note 8, "Really a book of drawings, not sonnets."

The Editor's assertions are too sweeping:

(1) It is supposed that the book of Rafael's kept by Guido Reni and lost after his death contained drawings.

(2) But it is known that Rafael wrote some three or four love-sonnets on the back of sketches, and these are still preserved. One of them is in the British Museum.

(3) It may be that similarly the 100 drawings in the book lost had each one a sonnet on the back, — that Browning had some information that this was the case, or guessed that it might be so.

b. The following notes in addition to, or in completion of, those in the Globe Edition:

P. 472, l. 33, *Rafael* (in English more often *Raphael*), famous painter, born 1483, died 1520; *century*, 100, — now narrowed down to a measure of time but formerly used for 100 of anything.[1]

l. 37, *these*, the Madonnas; *but one*, supply *might view*.

l. 38, *Who that one?* Browning refers to the story popularly told of Rafael's attachment for a baker's daughter in Rome. The story rests on slight foundations, if any. Her name is given as Margherita, and the painting of which she is supposed to be the original is in the Barberini Palace

[1] Thus a Roman legion was divided into centuries of soldiers, Shakespeare (*Cymbeline*, IV. ii. 301) has "a century of prayers," and we still say "a century-run" made *e.g.* on a bicycle.

in Rome. It is signed by Rafael on a bracelet worn by the figure. Since about 1750, the picture has been called *La Fornarina* (*i.e.* "The Bakeress"). The portrait also named *La Fornarina*, in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, is not by Rafael but by Sebastian del Piombo (1485–1547), and does not resemble the face in Rafael's painting in the Barberini Palace. The same should be said of another *La Fornarina* by the same Sebastian in the Old Museum, Berlin.

l. 50, *San Sisto*, Saint Sixtus the Martyr (Sixtus II, elected Bishop of Rome Aug. 31st, 257, beheaded Aug. 6th, 258, in the persecution under the Emperor Valerian); he *names* a Madonna, *i.e.* it is named from him the *Madonna di San Sisto*, the *Sistine Madonna*, because it was painted as an altarpiece for the Church of San Sisto at Piacenza and has in it a figure representing St. Sixtus in an attitude of adoration (at the left as you face the picture), — it is now in the Royal Gallery in Dresden; *Foligno*, a town in Central Italy, — the *Madonna of Foligno* is now in the Vatican.

l. 51. The picture referred to is in the Pitti Palace at Florence and represents the Madonna appearing to a votary in a vision. It is called the *Madonna del Granduca*.

l. 52. The picture called *La Belle Jardinière*, in the Louvre in Paris, shows the Madonna seated in a garden among lilies.

l. 55, *Guido Reni*, eminent Italian painter, born 1575, died 1642.

l. 60, *Dante* (born 1265, died 1321) gives an account of this incident in the *Vita Nuova*, XXXV.

l. 61, *Beatrice*, Beatrice Portinari, who was idealized by Dante until she became the centre of his poetic inspiration.

P. 473, l. 13, *Bice*, contraction for Beatrice, used affectionately as a diminutive or nickname.

l. 29, *Heaven's gift* etc. — earth mars Heaven's gift, takes something away from it.

ll. 30 sqq. refer to Moses' smiting the rock for water (Ex. 17 : 1–7, Num. 20 : 1–11), and the implied comparison is to an artist's serving an ungrateful world.

l. 51, *Egypt's flesh-pots*, in the murmuring of the Hebrews against Moses (Ex. 16 : 2, 3).

l. 53, *Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance*, when Moses received the Law, may refer to the lightning on the forehead of the mountain (Ex. 19 : 9, 16, 18) or to the shining of Moses' face when he came down (Ex. 34 : 29, 30).

l. 57, *Jethro's daughter*, Moses' wife Zipporah (Ex. 2 : 16, 21, cf. 3 : 1).

l. 58, *The Æthiopian bondslave*, another wife of Moses (Num. 12 : 1), not so well known as Zipporah.

P. 474, l. 4, *missal-marge*, margin on the page of a missal, *i.e.* a book containing the Mass for regular and for special occasions.

ll. 23–35. They saw the new moon in Florence, saw it grow into a full moon; then they came to London, and see it now in the last quarter there.

l. 27, *Fiesole*, a town on a hill near Florence, readily seen from the city. This is why the new moon came

"Drifted[1] over Fiesole by twilight."

l. 29, *Samminiato*, San Miniato, a famous church in Florence. Cf. *Giovambattista*,[2] *i.e.* Giovanni Battista (John Baptist).

ll. 36 sqq. This myth in many forms is woven into Literature. Cf. Keats' *Endymion*.

[1] Passive participle modifying *she* (l. 28), — in the same construction as the active participle *curving* (l. 26).

[2] *The Ring and the Book*, p. 664, l. 13.

l. 39, *mythos* (Gk. μῦθος), a speech, a story (at first a true story); then a myth.

l. 42, *Zoroaster*, founder of the ancient Persian religion, which is spoken of as Zoroastrianism; it survives (in a modified form, no doubt) as the religion of the Parsees in India. It is impossible to get any definite information as to when he lived. It was probably 1000 years B.C. or more.

l. 43, *Galileo*, an Italian astronomer, born 1564, died 1642.

l. 44, *Dumb to Homer*, cf. the Hymn to Diana in the *Iliad*, XXI; *dumb to Keats*, cf. his *Endymion*. The point is that the moon in love with a mortal might turn and show him what *not even* those most interested in the moon — Zoroaster, Galileo, Homer, Keats — have ever seen.

ll. 45 sqq., speculation as to what the other side of the moon might be like, if she turned round for a mortal whom she loved. Beginning with l. 63, the poem goes on to make two applications of this figure: (1) ll. 63–66, Browning or any man has "two soul-sides" one of which is shown only to a woman whom he loves; (2) ll. 66–76, Browning does see the other side of Mrs. Browning's personality, — he stands with the world and praises that side which all see, but also he passes around to the other side and sees her soul as the world never sees it.

ll. 51 sqq., at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24: 1–11, especially vss. 9–11).

l. 56, *the bodied heaven*, a phrase adapted from Ex. 24: 10, "as it were the body of heaven in his clearness." "The body of heaven" was the sky, which in ancient days was supposed to be a substantial thing — "the firmament."

ll. 77–80, an illustration of what in Rhetoric is technically called *Chiasmus* (Gk. χιασμός, a placing crosswise, — derived ultimately from the letter χ). If we yoke up the lines

as they grammatically go, we shall see the crossing, *i.e.* one statement is ll. 77 and 79, the other is ll. 78 and 80 — thus:

"Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song — and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel — borne, see, on my bosom!"

3. *The argument in the poem.*

Section I. Browning dedicates the 50 poems in *Men and Women* to Mrs. Browning — she has his heart already — let her have his brain also, *i.e.* let her have these poems, the product of his brain.

Sections II–VII. Cases of men who have done, or undertaken to do, something out of their usual line for one they love most, — something they wouldn't try to do for the public.

Section VIII. Statement of what is the point in the preceding illustrations.

Sections IX–XI. Discussion of the reason why a man wishes to do as in the cases cited, — the reason being that the public mars the fineness of a man's doing and he has to sustain toward them a fixed attitude and does not really make his best known. Consequently, when he does want to express his best to one whom he loves, he feels like adopting a different vehicle from that used in dealing with the world. Further illustrations, these being from Moses' experience with the Hebrew people.

Sections XII–XIV. Application of the foregoing, *i.e.* of the instincts and principles discussed, to Browning's attitude toward Mrs. Browning. He is unable to turn to another form of art for her sake to express his love, — he can only write verse. But with wealth of illustrations he shows that a man with only one artistic ability may use it

in a way to him unique, for a particular purpose. So Browning writes now, as never before and never again, — the poem being this *One Word More.*

Sections XV–XVIII. A figure from the moon and what a man might see if she really loved him, as in the classical myth. So with a personality, only love really knows it. Mrs. Browning knows Browning[1] because of their love, and for the same reason he knows her.[2] Each sees in the other's nature what is never shown to the world.

Section XIX. Mrs. Browning fulfills for Browning the desire which made Rafael turn from painting to write sonnets and made Dante turn from poetry to draw an angel.

4. *The charm of the poem* is elusive, but none the less real, and is, indeed, rather haunting. We come back to *One Word More* scores of times, and it is always new and exquisite. The charm may be due partly to the unusual metre, partly to the fact that the poem is a mosaic of allusions to Art and Literature, so that it "holds out" well no matter how much we read it, partly to the subtle truth presented in it.[3] The passion and devotion which actuate it also help in its hold on us.

[1] P. 474, ll. 23, "Not but that you know me!" and 66, "This I say of me," and the general statement ll. 63–65.

[2] The application to Mrs. Browning (ll. 66–76) is naturally longer and finer, — how on the side of her personality away from the world he enters the

"Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of."

[3] Browning had the ability to discuss, or at least to state, very subtle facts of human nature. For another example in a short poem, see *Two in the Campagna* (pp. 250, 251).

VIII

SAUL AND IN A BALCONY

I. SAUL, pp. 239–245

PUBLISHED as follows: The first nine sections in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, 1845; the whole poem as now in vol. II of *Men and Women*, 1855. Although ten years elapsed between the appearance of the first part and that of the remainder of the poem, the reader does not detect it in passing from section IX into the following sections. The discussion of *Saul* is put at this point in the course because more than half of the poem belongs to *Men and Women*, and because, though one of the most widely read of Browning's poems, it is also one of the most difficult.

1. *The Suggestion on which the Poem is Founded.*

This is found in 1 Sam. 16: 14–23. It is the account of Saul's illness and David's playing the harp before him. The passage should be carefully read before reading the poem.

2. *The Purpose of the Poem.*

a. Men sometimes wonder whether anything is worth while. They lose interest in life. It all seems "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable." Some of you may have passed through this experience. Many of you will have to. Why live? Why struggle? What does it all amount to? "Surely every man walketh in a vain show." Everything is dust and ashes, and life is just a wretched "mess," a game "not worth the candle."

b. Browning takes Saul as a type of those seized with such despair. Or perhaps Saul's case is too extreme to be typical. Saul's illness is described in the early history of the Hebrews, according to the time, as due to seizure by an evil spirit. Browning interprets it as a *lethargy*, — a loss of all interest in life, which condition paralyzes all effort of mind and body. Why make any effort? Nothing is of worth. Men who think there is something of worth in life are deceived. Let it all go.

c. What can stimulate a man like that to take an interest in life again? What *really makes life worth while?*

d. David, in the songs given him by Browning, answers the question. (1) It is the following day[1] when David relates how he went to Saul and what he said as he sang. (2) David, as he tells it, is back with his sheep, in the narrow valley of the Kidron, a brook near Jerusalem; he looks out toward the south to the city of Hebron, on the mountain in the distance.[2] (3) David tells how he came at the summons, was met by Abner, commander of Saul's army (1 Sam. 26: 5), how he kissed Abner (the oriental fashion), then of his experience when, after praying, he entered Saul's tent.

3. *Some Details which David Gives Incidentally.*

Such details are vivid and interesting.

a. As to Saul himself: (1) his huge figure[3] (see 1 Sam. 9: 1, 2, and 10: 23) and his movements when stirred by the singing;[4] (2) his position among the people. We need

[1] P. 243, ll. 7–13. The whole of section XIV, after the first half line, is parenthetical and refers to the situation in which he finds himself the following morning. Cf. also p. 245, section XIX, especially ll. 12 sqq.

[2] P. 243, ll. 9, 11, 12.

[3] P. 240, ll. 4–6; cf. l. 42 and p. 243, ll. 30, 31.

[4] P. 240, ll. 42 sqq.; p. 241, ll. 40 sqq.; p. 243, ll. 13 sqq. Notice especially p. 243, ll. 33–40.

to revise our usual notion of the circumstances. We must not be misled by what we associate with the word "king." Browning's picture is more true to history. The Hebrews had gotten a foothold in the country and were struggling to maintain it. Saul, chosen as their first king, was practically a fighting chief. Hence David finds him, not in a palace, but in his camp.

b. The tent (described somewhat in section III) is of skins[1] or else of goats' hair.[2] In either case it is dark inside; hence David, coming from the sunlight outside, is unable to make out things until his eyes become accustomed to the gloom — he makes out the main tent-prop and the figure of Saul before the sunbeam gets in through the roof and shows him Saul clearly.[3]

c. The harpstrings in the days of David were of catgut or even of vegetable fibre. The intense heat would cause them to shrink, and so they might "snap 'neath the stress of the noontide." Hence the lilies (in section V, cf. section II), twined round the strings to keep them moist. The observation that there was no danger that heat would cause the strings to snap would hold true only if metal strings were used, and metal strings are later. Some types of harp are still equipped wholly or in part with gut strings.

d. Many details of customs you will notice in the songs: *e.g.* in section VII, marriage, funeral, and liturgical customs; in section VIII (ll. 42–44) and section XV (ll. 16–27), the dress of the chief; in section IX (p. 240, ll. 49 sqq.), hunting

[1] Tents at a very early period were probably of skins. Traces of such use of skins are found in the Old Testament, *e.g.* Ex. 26 : 14.

[2] Early in the history of the Hebrews, goats' hair was spun and woven by the women for such uses. See Ex. 35 : 26, also 36 : 14. Such tents were dark-colored, cf. Song of Solomon 1 : 5.

[3] P. 240, ll. 2–6.

and food; again in section IX (p. 241, ll. 7–11), the office for the dying; in section XIII (ll. 43 sqq.), methods of commemorating the deeds of the great.

4. *Plan of Versification.*

a. The verse is rhymed *five-foot anapestic, i.e.* the normal line is made up of five periods, each composed of three syllables with the accent on the last syllable: thus *e.g.*

That exténds | to the séc | ond enclós | ure, I gróped | my way ón,[1]

or

The submís | sion of mán's | nothing - pér | fect to Gód's | all-compléte.[2]

But the verse is used with great freedom, as anapestic verse is by all skillful poets,[3] and the completely regular lines are not much more than half the whole number. The variations, as Browning handles the verse, consist chiefly in dropping one of the unaccented syllables at the beginning of a line, or in any other foot, except the last.[4]

b. Browning has worked out a device for emphasizing certain words. The plan is effective. The words strike the reader, whether he stops to analyze how it is done or not. This will be noticed at the end of section III:

"Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof, showed Saul."

At the end of section VI:

"But I stopped here: for here in the darkness Saul groaned."

And at the end of section IX:

[1] P. 239, l. 66. [2] P. 244, l. 3.

[3] See Joseph B. Mayor, *Handbook of Modern English Metre*, Cambridge, 1903, Chapter V.

[4] Sometimes there is an additional unaccented syllable after the close of the last foot, as *e.g.* p. 243, ll. 3, 4. In at least one case, Browning has four syllables in a foot, — p. 241, l. 6, last foot.

"Brought to blaze on the head of one creature — King Saul!"

There actually are in each of these lines only four feet, and the *time* of two feet is given to the last foot. Hence the emphasis on "showed Saul," "Saul groaned," and "King Saul," — *i.e.* the mind and voice involuntarily slow up and give to the words the additional beat which the rhythm requires.[1]

5. *The Steps by which David brings Saul back to an Interest in Life.*

David shows him, in an ascending scale, what is worth living for.

a. David plays first the tunes that appeal to brutes (sections V and VI). The animals below man are many of them very susceptible to music. David is beginning at the foundation — not argument nor the content of song, but sheer sound — that is what attracts the lower animals.

Will this soothe and stimulate Saul? No. These tunes which stir the lower animals provoke no sign from Saul.

b. Then David sings the everyday interests of human life. This is his second move (sections VII and VIII). These are the things that occupy the attention of most people. Life's hours are largely taken up with this round of things — our conversation is chiefly about them. The points sung about are the things of importance in the average life. Each point is typical: The reapers' song (typical of the social gathering), the lament for the dead, the marriage chant, the organization of government[2] (or

[1] Such devices are common in poetry, and are used instinctively by good artists. The omission of one of the syllables of a foot, allowing the time to fill up the space, is of a similar sort.

[2] Or do the lines (p. 240 ll. 36–38) refer to the building of a material structure, as *e.g.* in connection with the walls of a city? The uncertainty arises from our inability to determine whether Browning meant us to take

of social institutions in general), the Levites' chorus as they go up to the altar (typical of the place which worship occupies in life). The order is curious: we would think the lament for the dead would be last. But the person described in these different songs is not the same man. The *observer*, whose life touches all these things described in the songs, continues the same man — you or I. And all these things are mingled just so in our living, *i.e.* we come in contact with joy and sorrow close together, — we are interested in feast, funeral, wedding, politics, religion — and these often in incongruous closeness to each other. Such are the things in which people in general are interested — the things that stimulate our thinking and our conversation.

Will these songs stir Saul? These songs, rehearsing the usual events of interest in life, call out from Saul only a groan and a movement of the head.

c. How can David stimulate Saul further, now that he has attracted his attention? David's third move is two-fold:

(1) He sings of the sheer joy of living (section IX, from the beginning to p. 241, l. 4). If we are well and normal, just being alive, tingling with life, ought to be its own reward. The joy of life is set forth as it would appeal to a red-blooded man of Saul's time.

(2) David points to the greatness of Saul's life in particular (the rest of section IX), — how much centres in him, how great is his opportunity — therefore how great his incentive to live the fullest life.

"buttress an arch" (l. 37) literally or figuratively. I used to think that it referred to the marriage, "our friends" (l. 38) being the pair just married. But the punctuation forbids that and shows that this is another independent song of the series. The fact that the "arch" is something to protect the friends of those who build it leads me to think that the arch is a system of government, the builders statesmen; or else that it stands for civilization and society, in which we all are builders.

This strikes into Saul, especially the shouting of his own name at the end, and he releases himself, letting go the cross-support on the tent-pole to which he had clung (section x). His movement is like the sliding of snow from a mountain in the warmth of spring.[1]

d. David is at a loss now what to sing next to stimulate Saul to live and do his work in the world (sections XI and XII). But presently thoughts develop which came to him when he was with his sheep, and he sings now (section XIII), saying that the real greatness of Saul is not in living a mere mortal life, but in his great deeds which will live after him — be recorded on the rock's face and on cedar tablets and in papyrus rolls, and hand his name and fame to posterity. This is one of the strongest desires of men, that their work shall not perish with them. Surely this will rouse Saul to see that life is good and to be eager to live it. Such is the fourth step.

This appeal restores Saul (section XV) to "his old motions and habitudes kingly." He is coming back to a realization that it is worth while to live, to achieve, to rule.

e. What shall David sing next to bring Saul completely into fullness of life? He drops the harp with which he had sung up to this time, and breaks out into exhortation (section XVI, "No harp more — no song more! out-broke —"), the fifth step. The rush of truth as to what makes life most worth living comes with some confusion in sections XVII and XVIII, consistently with David's enthusiasm as it is borne in upon him. If set forth in too orderly a way, it would not reflect the surging tide in David's

[1] P. 241, ll. 29–40, an elaborate description of the sliding of the snow from the mountain. This interrupts the account of what Saul did, — the account which begins near the middle of l. 27 and is continued near the middle of l. 40. Lines 29–40 unfortunately distract attention from Saul's movements, instead of making clearer what he did.

thoughts. It deals with things of supreme value, it is truth of the highest life in man. It is grounded in the infinite love of God, which must be a fact or else we exceed God, for we love. We find that God is infinitely beyond us in everything else. It must be, then, that there is an infinitude of love to match the infinitude of the rest of His nature. And this infinite love of God must issue in three things, and these are essential if man is to come to the fulfillment of the spiritual life:

(1) The immortality of man, not merely in his works, but the immortality of his living self.

(2) A way of redemption whereby God suffers for man, even as we are willing to suffer for those we love.

(3) A "human life of God" in the Messiah, the Christ, so that God may have perfect sympathy with the human struggle: this is the only way man can be saved.

Each of these strands is woven in more or less several times, but after all there is progress in the song. The fact that God infinitely surpasses us in every way, as far as we can see in His universe, is laid down first.[1] Then the necessity of believing that God is not inferior to us in the one element Love is strongly set forth.[2] The love of God issuing in some redemptive plan comes next,[3] such redemption involving the immortality of man.[4] The love of God compelling Him to suffer for man, else He is inferior to us who suffer for one another, is then taken up.[5] That this makes necessary the coming of the Divine into a human experience, or the union of Divine and human in one ex-

[1] P. 243, l. 46–p. 244, l. 4. Notice especially p. 243, ll. 51–58.
[2] P. 244, ll. 5–20, especially ll. 10–20.
[3] P. 244, ll. 21–36, especially ll. 27–33.
[4] P. 244, ll. 28, 34–36.
[5] P. 244, ll. 37–54, especially ll. 49–53.

perience, is the last point brought forward.[1] The immortality of man appears also in these closing lines of the song.

Such words as these in sections XVII and XVIII, put in the mouth of David, while more definite and theological than the Old Testament Messianic prophecy (especially of so early a time as 1000 B.C.), are not inconsistent with the longing of the Hebrews and their Messianic hope, at least as it developed in later centuries of their history.

6. *The Conclusion.*

Section XIX tells how the realization of the great things of the spiritual life, which had come upon David in his last song, made him aware of the living world of the unseen as he went home, and how even next morning he saw a new meaning in all Nature. The point in this section is that, when a man recognizes the presence of the redemptive power in the world, he sees the world as he never saw it before.

II. In a Balcony, pp. 475–486

Published in vol. II of *Men and Women*, 1855.

1. *The Nature of the Poem.*

It is simply conversation. There is only a little action. The dramatic motives are strong, but the piece is in no sense a drama, and was never called a drama by Browning. The piece is made up of one scene. A few directions are put in to make plain the going in and coming out.

2. *The Place.*

The conversation takes place in a balcony overlooking the street.[2]

a. You have often seen on a house such a balcony, projecting over the street or lawn (perhaps on top of the

[1] P. 244, ll. 55–62, especially ll. 57–62.

[2] P. 477, ll. 7–9.

porch), and entered by doors from the second floor, — a place to sit in summer. Many apartment houses have such a balcony connected with each suite of rooms.

b. This particular balcony, as we see from the poem, opens from the parlors and banquet-room of the Palace. To have the parlors on what we call the second floor (what they call there the first floor) is quite common on the Continent. So also very often in England, in attending some social function, you leave your wraps down stairs and are received in a drawing-room up stairs.

c. Those on this balcony are only six steps from where the others are.[1] They hear the music[2] even when the doors are closed, but it is especially noticeable when one goes in or out.[3] On this balcony the moon shines.[4] There are several pieces of statuary here,[5] also palms and magnolias.[6]

3. *The Persons.*

The persons involved in the conversation are:

a. The Queen. We gather readily from the conversation these facts: She is fifty years old,[7] thin[8] and already gray,[9] sole ruler of a considerable country (ruler with even despotic power[10]). She married unhappily years ago and is separated from her husband but not divorced.[11] With

[1] P. 475, l. 46; p. 476, l. 44. [2] P. 478, l. 40; p. 486, l. 41.

[3] P. 479, stage direction following l. 23; p. 482, stage direction following l. 57.

[4] P. 481, l. 78; p. 482, l. 57. Cf. p. 478, l. 23.

[5] P. 478, ll. 31–34; p. 482, ll. 54–56.

[6] P. 479, ll. 40–42; p. 485, ll. 45–47. The palm and the magnolia mentioned can hardly be on a lawn or in a garden below, because this balcony is over a street (p. 477, ll. 7–9).

[7] P. 476, l. 76. Cf. p. 479, ll. 65–68; also p. 481, ll. 36–39.

[8] P. 478, l. 49; p. 479, ll. 18, 53.

[9] P. 481, l. 14, cf. ll. 36–39; p. 479, l. 53.

[10] P. 477, l. 45, cf. the whole passage ll. 39–52, also ll. 73–75; p. 486, ll. 12 sqq., especially from l. 37 to the end.

[11] P. 476, ll. 65–70; p. 481, l. 67–p. 482, l. 19, especially ll. 67, 68, 79–81 of p. 481.

this and other experiences she has suffered much,[1] but has a just and generous nature.[2] She is flattered and fawned upon by men whose reason for so doing, as she well knows,[3] is to secure their own advancement, — she with a nature starving[4] for real affection and hardening into marble[5] for the lack of it, but a nature of splendid intensity when set on fire.[6]

b. Norbert, the Prime-Minister[7] of the Kingdom — a position which he has held for one year — a man whose splendid statesmanship has done so much for the Queen during this year,[8] the greatest thing being that he has succeeded in combining two states and fixing the crowns of both on this Queen's head.[9] He is frank,[10] fearless,[11] and an ardent lover.[12]

c. Constance, the Queen's cousin,[13] young and beautiful,[14] taken to the Palace by the Queen[15] some time ago. Evidently Constance's parents are dead, although that is not stated. The Queen is Constance's guardian in fact, if

[1] P. 476, ll. 65–70; p. 478, ll. 49–52; p. 482, ll. 6–8.

[2] P. 476, ll. 14, 15, 35, 36; p. 478, ll. 45–94, especially ll. 48, 49, 56, 57, 65–69, 71–74, 79, 80; p. 480, ll. 41–72.

[3] P. 480, ll. 14–16, especially l. 16. Cf. also ll. 17 sqq.

[4] P. 478, l. 51.

[5] P. 480, ll. 4–36, especially ll. 7, 9, 21.

[6] See her whole conversation when she thinks Norbert loves her.

[7] P. 475, l. 51, cf. l. 52; cf. also p. 476, l. 27, and p. 480, ll. 4, 14, 15.

[8] P. 475, l. 53; p. 480, ll. 41–43; p. 485, l. 21.

[9] P. 475, ll. 53–59; p. 476, ll. 1–3.

[10] P. 478, ll. 2–9; p. 479, l. 10; and often. The "chaos of intrigues" in which he has been involved as Premier has been very distasteful to him (p. 478, ll. 10–22).

[11] P. 483, ll. 28, 29; and often. See also his whole attitude.

[12] P. 475, ll. 1–18; p. 477, l. 36; p. 478, ll. 10, 11; and very often.

[13] P. 476, ll. 13, 29; p. 477, l. 20; and often. Cf. p. 478, l. 72.

[14] P. 482, l. 22, cf. ll. 23–25.

[15] P. 478, ll. 71–74; p. 479, ll. 18, 19, 65; p. 481, ll. 21–24.

not in legal form. Constance is politic,[1] and not averse to dissimulation.[2]

4. *The Occasion.*

The occasion is the great banquet[3] to celebrate the results achieved by Norbert's statesmanship during the past year. He is the centre of praise and congratulation.[4] But he has slipped away from the festivities[5] for a moment, even while the Queen is waiting for him to name his reward.[6] As the poem opens, he stands here now in the balcony with Constance.

5. *The Story.*

The story is very simple. Norbert has wrought so well all the year, not for gain, not for honor, but for love of Constance, the Queen's cousin. To-night in his hour of triumph, his praise in every mouth, he feels sure he can ask the Queen for whatever reward he will and it will be granted. He begs Constance to let him tell the Queen his love for her cousin and ask the Queen to grant him that cousin's hand to-night. Constance insists that such a move will disappoint the Queen, make her angry, and spoil

[1] See her argument in all the first four pages. Contrast Norbert's replies.

[2] See her whole conduct in the last four pages of the poem, — her brazen pretense, her effort to force Norbert to pretend that the Queen has understood correctly.

[3] P. 475, ll. 53, 54, 59. Cf. p. 477, ll. 26–28; p. 478, ll. 13–16; p. 480, ll. 41–43; p. 485, l. 21. For a while I was accustomed to think there was a council also this evening, in connection with the banquet. This was on account of p. 477, ll. 46–48, — supposing that Norbert had abruptly concluded this council and that the "one minute's meeting in the corridor" was just now before the lovers came out on the balcony. But undoubtedly this is not so. The council and the meeting in the corridor were at some other time, in the year past, — one of the many secret interviews and communications of which others are mentioned in ll. 49–52, — all summed up in l. 53.

[4] P. 475, l. 59; p. 476, ll. 1–3.

[5] P. 477, ll. 41–44.

[6] P. 475, l. 7; p. 476, l. 4; p. 478, ll. 41, 42; p. 480, ll. 73–76.

the brilliant future which is open to Norbert in the government. Norbert declares that he doesn't want his love kept secret and insists upon telling the Queen now. Constance finally agrees, only insisting upon how he shall put the matter — she makes him promise to begin by flattering the Queen (contrary to Norbert's inclination), then to go on and tell her that Constance is as a ribbon the Queen wears, that Constance is so near the Queen that she seems a piece of the Queen's self, and that therefore he loves Constance, — so coming to the point and asking for Constance's hand. So Norbert goes in to ask.[1] He follows the method insisted upon by Constance — but unfortunately. Before he can get to the real point the Queen jumps to the conclusion that he is proposing *to her*. It is too good to be true, but she grasps his love and appropriates it, and rushes out on the balcony to find Constance and tell her about it. Poor Constance sees what has happened but cannot explain, and listens to the Queen going on about how beautiful and wonderful love is, how she will get free from the husband who has been tied to her but separated from her these many years, how much it all means in her life, and so on. The Queen goes back into the parlors, and Norbert comes again on the balcony to talk with Constance. In a few minutes the Queen comes out again. Constance makes a great "bluff," trying to force Norbert to act as if the Queen had understood aright. But Norbert, all frankness, will have none of it. The Queen sees her mistake and is overwhelmed with humiliation and anger, — that such hope should be awakened in her, only to turn at once to ashes. She goes in, and the heavy feet of the guard are heard coming to place Norbert and Constance under arrest.

[1] A brief interval (p. 479, between ll. 23 and 24), while Norbert speaks with the Queen.

The whole trouble has come through insincerity, or at least through the lack of frankness and directness. The Queen confesses to Constance that she thought Norbert was working for love and thought it was Constance he loved, and that she had decided to grant Constance's hand when he should ask it. Had he gone on as he wished this evening, all would have been well. Constance's wanting him to approach by flattery and to present his request in an indirect way made all the misunderstanding and disaster.

6. *The Excellence of the Poem.*

The excellence of the poem consists, then, not in its plot. That is slender and gives simply the ground for the dialogue. The excellence of the piece is the excellence of the conversation. It is a conversation almost altogether about love as the thing most worth while. Seldom will you find the matter put more passionately and beautifully. Norbert's declarations as to what love means are superior to those of either of the women. The Queen's are a close second, and Constance's a poor third. Perhaps no words of Norbert's are finer than those in which he defines his attitude toward life:[1]

> "I count life just the stuff
> To try the soul's strength on, educe the man."

If I were obliged to say which seems to me the most remarkable passage in the poem, I would say the passage in which the Queen describes her loneliness and heart-hunger in the midst of all their deference and adulation,[2] and especially the closing lines:[3]

> "There have been moments, if the sentinel
> Lowering his halbert to salute the queen,
> Had flung it[4] brutally and clasped my knees,
> I would have stooped and kissed him with my soul."

[1] P. 483, ll. 28, 29.
[2] P. 480, ll. 4–36.
[3] P. 480, ll. 33–36.
[4] *i.e.* had flung it down.

IX

A GROUP OF THE DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

WE have already discussed[1] a few of the shortest poems which appeared in *Dramatis Personæ*, 1864. We turn now to a group of the longer poems in that volume.

I. ABT VOGLER, pp. 499, 500

1. *Abt*, German, meaning *abbot*, — used here not in the sense of head of an abbey, or monastery, but in the sense in which the French word *abbé* is frequently used, *i.e.* as a title for an ecclesiastic who is not engaged in the regular Church work, but instead in literary, educational, or musical lines. For such a man we use in English *abbé*, instead of our own word *abbot*.

2. George Joseph Vogler was born in Würzburg, Bavaria, June 15, 1749. He was educated for the Church, and was ordained priest in Rome in 1773. He opened a school of music at Mannheim, in Baden, in 1775. About 1786 he went to Sweden, and founded a school of music in Stockholm. He invented an instrument called the *Orchestrion*, — a compact organ with four keyboards of five octaves each and a pedal board of 36 keys, the whole capable of being packed into small space for transportation. It is this instrument to which Browning refers.[2] With this instrument, Abbé Vogler travelled extensively and gave recitals, — often with meager success at first. His recitals in

[1] In Chapter V.

[2] In the words: "After he has been extemporizing upon the musical instrument of his invention," placed in parenthesis under the title.

London in January, 1790, were, however, received with great enthusiasm. Returning to the Continent, he now met with great success everywhere. He established his third school of music at Darmstadt, the capital of Hesse, in 1807, and there Weber and Meyerbeer were among his pupils. He died at Darmstadt, May 6, 1814.

Vogler was *Kapellmeister* (*i.e.* director of the band or orchestra, sometimes with a choir also, maintained at court) in Mannheim, Stockholm, and Darmstadt. He composed a number of operas (only the later ones proving in any degree successful) and some church music. His *Missa Pastoricia* (Pastoral Mass, Shepherds' Mass) is sung every Christmas at the Court-Chapel in Vienna.

3. Browning presents Vogler meditating over his keys, after extemporizing on his Orchestrion:

a. If he could only make music *visible*, then what he has been playing would appear as a palace. Then he goes on to describe that "palace of music."

b. Then he turns his thoughts upon the *creative power* which the musician has.

c. But the music which he created — which, if it could be seen as well as heard, would be a palace — is gone. Gone? No. Nothing good can die. All harmony exists unto eternity. This is the only thing that makes life worth while and gives it strong and victorious music —saves it from the minor key. It is "the C Major of this life."

4. Difficult points:

Stanza 1 — *as when Solomon willed*. Legends both Jewish and Mohammedan exalt Solomon's power and wisdom far beyond what is said of him in the Old Testament. The legends make him commander of the demons and of the powers of Nature. This power he owed to the fact that he possessed a seal with the ineffable name of the God

of the Hebrews on it.[1] See the reference to this name later in this stanza. Cf. also stanza IX.

Stanza II — *nether springs*, lower springs, *i.e.* springs at the bottom of the world. The phrase is unfortunate because men do not lay the foundations of a palace *on springs*, nor on springy ground, but on rock.

Stanza III — *gold as transparent as glass*. Cf. Rev. 21: 18, 21. *Outlining . . . Rome's dome*, the dome of St. Peter's Church in Rome, which used to be, on great festivals *e.g.* that of Easter, outlined by fixing on it thousands of candles.

Stanza V — *Protoplast*, the thing first modelled, the thing from which all the other similar things are copied. The word is from the same root as the more familiar word *protoplasm*, the physical basis of life, identical in the cells of all living things.

Stanza VII — *that can*, *can* used as an independent verb, not as an auxiliary, — used here as in "I can no more." *The will that can* means the will that has power, the will that does things, the will that creates. *That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star — star* used figuratively, meaning something far above, far more striking than, what we had before. The point is: If you mix three colors together, you will get a *color*. But if you mix three tones in a chord, the result will not be a fourth *tone*, but a harmony of the three. Thus the musician has a sort of creative power.

Stanza XII — Vogler resumes now on his instrument, beginning with a chord in the major key. He modulates into the minor key, and "blunts it into a ninth." *Blunt* here means to flat; *it*, the chord, or the note which de-

[1] We have given a brief discussion in regard to this name in Chapter II. See p. 57.

termines the chord; *a ninth* means an octave and one degree additional, which in the major key amounts to an octave and a full tone, but in the minor, in which Vogler is now playing, amounts to an octave and a semitone over. A full *chord of the ninth* consists of the root with its third, fifth, seventh, and ninth. While playing in the minor, he "stands on alien ground," because he has modulated away from the major into music conveying a different impression, — the major key expressing what is bright and exhilarating, the music of hope, joy, victory, — the minor key being melancholy, the music of longing, discouragement, grief, despair. He surveys "awhile the heights" (*heights* used figuratively for the major from which he has gotten away), from which he rolled "into the deep," *i.e.* into the minor key. "Which, hark," — and as he suits the action to the word, we hear him modulate back into the major key. *Which* is the heights, the major; and he has "dared and done" the heights when he has gotten back into the major key. The point in "now I will try to sleep" is that life lived in C Major is normal; in that a man may rest.

A detailed explanation of a modulation such as Browning here describes is given by Miss Porter and Miss Clarke in their note in the Camberwell Edition,[1] as follows:

> Suppose Abt Vogler, when he "feels for the common chord," to have struck the chord of C major in its first inversion, *i.e.* the third, E, in the bass, the fifth, G, at the top; now, "sliding by semitones," that is, playing in succession chords with the upper note a semitone lower, he would come to the chord A, E, C, which is the (minor) tonic chord of the scale of A, the relative minor of C, and so he would thus "*sink* to the minor." Now he blunts the fifth of this

[1] Camberwell Browning, vol. V, pp. 309, 310. We quote exactly, preserving the punctuation. The same note verbatim will be found in the vol. of Browning's *Poems* edited by the same ladies, 1896, pp. 476, 477, — its earlier appearance.

chord E to E♭, which thus becomes a minor ninth over the root D, the whole chord being D, F♯, A, C, E♭, and, as he explains, he stands on alien ground because he has modulated away from the key of C, but, instead of following this dominant by its natural solution, its own tonic, which would be G, B, D, he treats it as if it were what is called a supertonic harmony. So, after pausing on this chord to survey awhile the heights he rolled from into the deep, he suddenly modulates back to C. He has dared and done, his resting-place is found — the C major of this life.

Miss Porter and Miss Clarke present[1] the music on the staff, to show the whole progression as described.

5. The best part of the poem is stanzas VIII–XII inclusive, the discussion of the persistence of all that is good — its survival beyond what is called death. This is at one with the faith Browning shows in so many poems, some of which we have already studied in this course.[2] Abt Vogler seems to go further than the other statements in declaring the survival of all that is good, beautiful, or harmonious. It is remarkable that Browning, with such positive faith as this, could nevertheless put himself so completely into the point of view of a man like Cleon and give expression so poignantly to the hunger for immortality and the despair of its being satisfied.

II. Rabbi Ben Ezra, pp. 501–503

1. The man Rabbi Ben Ezra was a Jewish scholar and philosopher, born in Toledo, Spain, in 1092 A.D. His full name was Abraham ben Meir ben (or ibn) Ezra; he is usually cited as Aben Ezra or Ibn Ezra. He was always poor and studied hard. He travelled widely in Spain, France, Italy, Greece, and England. He gained fame as

[1] In both places referred to in our preceding note.

[2] e.g. *Prospice*, *Reverie*, and the *Epilogue* to *Asolando*. Cf. also, in *The Flight of the Duchess*, p. 363, ll. 98–100.

grammarian, theologian, astronomer, mathematician, poet, — but especially for his commentaries. In these commentaries, which are on most of the books of the Old Testament, he was one of the first of mediæval scholars to employ sound critical principles. He died in 1167. On his life and writings, the greatest work done in English has been done by Dr. M. Friedländer, whose studies include a translation of Ibn Ezra's *Commentary on Isaiah*, London, 1873,[1] and a series of *Essays on the Writings of Ibn Ezra*, London, 1877.[1]

2. Mr. A. J. Campbell declares that the distinctive features of Rabbi Ben Ezra's philosophy in Browning's poem are characteristic of the writings of the real Rabbi.[2] This shows Browning's way of doing. This poem is not a hit-or-miss piece of imagination. Browning informed himself in regard to Ibn Ezra's teaching (no doubt the poem was suggested by his reading in the writings of the Rabbi), and he gives here an epitome of how the real Ibn Ezra looked at life.

3. As to the *style* of Browning's poem:

While people are talking about Browning's taking so many words to say a thing, they should be reminded to read his *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, where the chief difficulties all arise from the *extreme condensation* — so few words expressing so much thought, in almost every stanza. Any stanza of the poem can be made plain by writing it out in full, *i.e.* supplying words and phrases implied. Indeed, this procedure is recommended. Take any stanza which you find difficult and try writing out the sentence completely in prose

[1] *Publications of the Society of Hebrew Literature.* Michael Friedländer, Ph.D., was for over 40 years (1865–1907) Principal of the Jewish College in London. He is the author of many works. See *Who's Who 1911*, p. 700.

[2] Campbell's notes on this point are given by Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopædia*, pp. 374–376.

form. You will be surprised to see how quickly it will straighten itself out.

4. As to the *philosophy:*

No poet in English has made old age so beautiful as Robert Browning has.[1] Old age is to Browning the fulfillment of youth and middle age, — the consummation of our earthly life.[2] He has set this forth in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* better than anywhere else.

a. Now growing old, looking backward over his life and forward to the great change which is called death, the Rabbi is serene and undismayed. Old age is the best of life, for which the earlier years were made; it is the fulfillment of God's plan.[3] Old age will only furnish him a chance to get perspective, to recognize what have been the real values in the past years, and to prepare himself to go forward into the unseen with the advantage gained from this review of his experience:[4]

> "And I shall thereupon
> Take rest, ere I be gone
> Once more on my adventure brave and new:
> Fearless and unperplexed,
> When I wage battle next,
> What weapons to select, what armour to indue."

b. With all the hardship and failure he has met, the Rabbi is glad that he chose high ideals, and would not accept anything else:[5]

> "What I aspired to be,
> And was not, comforts me:
> A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale."

[1] Cf. the Gipsy in *The Flight of the Duchess*, p. 363, ll. 81–100.

[2] But cf. how keenly Browning puts himself in Cleon's place, p. 471, ll. 27 sqq.

[3] Stanza I. [4] Stanza XIV. [5] Stanza VII.

That is, the fact that he did struggle for what he could not attain shows what was in him, and is therefore a comfort to him. The struggle of the years will be found at last to have removed him forever from the plane of the developed brute; he will be the germ of a god:[1]

"Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute; a god though in the germ."

After all, what a man really has done is not to be estimated by the visible results on which the public can lay its hand and on which it can set a value:[2]

"But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped."

c. No, man is not like a bird or beast, satisfied when filled with food. Man has something in him that will not be satisfied so.[3] Man is allied to the creative Power:[4]

"Rejoice we are allied
To That which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive!
A spark disturbs our clod;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe."

[1] Stanza XIII.
[2] Stanzas XXIII–XXV.
[3] Stanzas IV sqq.
[4] Stanza V.

The words "hold of" mean simply *are related to, partake of the nature of.* And because we partake of the nature of God, therefore hardships and sufferings are to be met with a high spirit:[1]

> "Then, welcome each rebuff
> That turns earth's smoothness rough,
> Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
> Be our joys three-parts pain!
> Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
> Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!"

d. The Rabbi does not believe in condemning the flesh and despising it as a clog to the spirit. We are not to say we have gained ground *in spite of* the flesh. Rightly understood, the body is good and the soul is good. In normal and complete living, the body will be up to its height and the soul up to its height, and each will help the other:[2]

> "As the bird wings and sings,
> Let us cry 'All good things
> Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!'"

This is the answer to the question proposed in the latter half of stanza VIII.

e. The poem is permeated with irrepressible optimism and implicit faith in God. Death opens to us life's completion.[3] This earth is only a Potter's wheel on which God shapes us.[4] And the ultimate purpose of the cup (a human personality) so shaped is to do God service, beyond the gates of death. Browning, with the splendid audacity which so often characterizes his handling of a metaphor, presents a picture of the destination of the cup shaped on

[1] Stanza VI. [2] Stanza XII. [3] Stanza XXXII, last line.

[4] Cf. Is. 64:8; Jer. 18:1–6. This figure, in the prophets, of God as a Potter influenced St. Paul's thought also, Rom. 9:20 sqq.

purpose to bear wine to the lips of God[1] — the Rabbi says that never in the worst whirl of the earthly experience has he mistaken the end he will ultimately serve, viz. to slake God's thirst.[2]

5. The poem is compact of great thoughts, and it is quite unsatisfactory to try to summarize it. To read it, not merely once but scores of times, that is what makes its wholesome and invigorating views of life grow on a man. There is no poem of equal length which will do more to make a man calm and stern and glad than Browning's *Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

III. A DEATH IN THE DESERT, pp. 503–512

1. The manner of presentation gives the work an air of antiquity which is very fascinating. This effect is produced by a statement in brackets, prefixed as if by an editor. The statement explains that what follows is from a manuscript supposed to be by Pamphylax, and describes the manuscript, its location in a particular chest, and its history. This last is really the master stroke: the editor has received the manuscript from Xanthus, his wife's uncle, now deceased. The impression received from this preface is increased by another explanation in brackets on the next page,[3] purporting to give a gloss originated by Theotypas. Something of a similar atmosphere is created by the matter enclosed in brackets at the end of the poem.

2. The poem purports to be an account of the death of the Apostle John.

a. The tradition of the Church from the latter half of the second century onward is that John came to an extreme age and was the last surviving of the Apostles. The tradition definitely associates the closing period of his life

[1] Stanzas XXIX and XXX. [2] Stanza XXXI. [3] P. 504, ll. 33–55.

with the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor and places his death in the time of Trajan, who became Emperor in the year 98 A.D.

b. Browning gives us here, from imagination, some sketch of the circumstances under which John's death took place, but that is not the main point. Whatever is said about his death is only a frame for his last address, his dying message. The circumstances related have a vivid reality except in one point, and that is improbable: The dying Apostle is unconscious, so far gone that it seems hardly possible to rouse him at all; yet when he is finally roused, he sits up and speaks page after page of keenly argued philosophy. Of course, it is not physically impossible that the man's vitality should thus reassert itself and give him an opportunity to spend all his last strength in this way, but it is improbable. Apart from the question which arises on this point, the setting which introduces the speech and follows it is dramatic and picturesque to a remarkable degree.

3. The thing that stimulated Browning to write the argument which he here puts in St. John's mouth was the trend of radical criticism, and especially Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (*Life of Jesus*) published in June, 1863. That Renan's book made considerable impression on Browning we see not only here but in the *Epilogue* to the very volume in which this poem appeared. In the *Epilogue*, the statement of doubt and disappointment is put in the mouth of a "Second Speaker, *as Renan*." [1] In *A Death in the Desert* the chief thing is Browning arguing against the extreme critical position with which he had become acquainted. It is true that Browning seems to be mixing up things pretty badly when he puts an answer to nineteenth century criticism in the mouth of St. John at the end of the first century. But

[1] P. 539, between ll. 75 and 76.

It should be said that the Apostle has a right to look forward and anticipate how his testimony as to Christ's life and teaching will be received in future centuries. The philosophy, however, in St. John's speech is exceedingly modern. Yet to this it may be answered that the great problems of life and faith are much the same in all centuries, and so the speech may, in a certain way, be justified in its setting. But after all it is impossible to escape a sense of dramatic infelicity in this poem.

4. Browning has taken pains to weave into the dying Apostle's speech many allusions to give it an atmosphere of reality. Such are the references to the speaker's extreme age and his having outlived the others,[1] the references to events in which he had a part,[2] and the reminiscences of New Testament writings associated with St. John's name.[3] Yet what Browning accomplishes in this line he undoes in large measure by references to Æschylus and the Prometheus-myth,[4] Jove,[5] Juno,[5] and Atlas,[6] — all of which sound very strange from the lips of the Apostle John, if he is the author of any of the New Testament writings with which his name has been connected.

5. The argument, though undoubtedly provoked by Renan's work, is aimed not only at him but at several phases of modern doubt. The following is a rough outline of the progress of it:

a. The Apostle reviews how he taught about Christ's life and how he wrote the works (the Fourth Gospel, 1, 2, and 3 John, Revelation) associated with his name.[7]

[1] P. 511, l. 56; p. 504, ll. 65–68. [2] *e.g.* p. 507, ll. 20–24.
[3] *e.g.* p. 504, ll. 71–74 (cf. Rev. 1 : 10–16); p. 505, ll. 1–5 (cf. 1 Jn. 1 : 1–3); p. 505, ll. 30, 31 (cf. 1 Jn. 2 : 18).
[4] P. 506, ll. 70–77; p. 510, ll. 21–30. [5] P. 508, ll. 51, 52.
[6] P. 510, l. 56. [7] P. 505, ll. 7–59.

b. But he foresees the rise of doubts and questionings, extending in far-off generations so far as to deny the genuineness of his testimony and even to dispute his own existence:

"Was John at all, and did he say he saw?" [1]

c. The life and death of Christ are to him a matter of perpetual present reality:

"To me, that story — ay, that Life and Death
Of which I wrote 'it was' — to me, it is;
— Is, here and now: I apprehend nought else." [2]

And he goes on to explain why this is so.[3]

d. Yet not as they are to him will seem Christ's life and death to coming generations. If the Apostle could use a telescope, wrong end to, on these events, he would see them look removed to a distance, as future centuries must see them. So he tries to see from that point of view.[4]

e. He founds his general argument on *Love* as the chief thing of worth in life:

"For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,
And hope and fear, — believe the aged friend, —
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is;
And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost
Such prize despite the envy of the world,
And, having gained truth, keep truth: that is all." [5]

f. This leads to the question:

"Does God love,
And will ye hold that truth against the world?" [6]

The answer [7] is along the line that the final test of things is in our own experience: things proven there we can never

[1] P. 505, l. 68. [2] P. 505, ll. 80, 81; p. 506, l. 1. [3] P. 506, ll. 2–16.
[4] P. 506, ll. 17 sqq. [5] P. 506, ll. 35–41. [6] P. 506, ll. 63, 64.
[7] P. 506, l. 65–p. 507, l. 11.

disown. If a man has really experienced the worth of Christ, he could no more give Him up than he could give up fire after he has proven its warmth; the worth of one would be as real as the worth of the other. Experience is the proof of

"The love that tops the might, the Christ in God." [1]

g. Presently the Apostle proceeds to state at some length the doubt whose burden will press upon men's thoughts in the latter days.[2] He will try to speak to those of future centuries as he would explain about the glow of light outside to a boy growing up in this cave and seeing only yon glimmer. He imagines those men standing

"On islets yet unnamed amid the sea,"

or in great cities

"Where now the larks sing in a solitude,"

or musing

"upon blank heaps of stone and sand
Idly conjectured to be Ephesus," —

and the question as to Christ is not

"Where is the promise of His coming?" [3]

which was the doubt that perplexed the Apostolic Age, but

"Was He revealed in any of His lives,
As Power, as Love, as Influencing Soul?" [4]

This is the great question, whether the view of Christ's person and power held by the Church is true to the facts —

[1] P. 506, l. 56.

[2] P. 507, l. 50–p. 508, l. 56.

[3] P. 507, l. 76; cf. p. 505, l. 49. In the first age of the Church, they expected the Second Coming of Christ within a generation. See Matt. 24: 34; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; and often. Cf. Browning, p. 512, ll. 9, 10.

[4] P. 507, ll. 77, 78.

whether Christ as pictured is not the product of human idealizing. The modern argument against our conception of God is considerably elaborated in St. John's statement of the doubt to which he is to reply, — that argument being that what we think we find in the universe is really something we have projected from our own minds.[1] Is it not so with the conception the Church has of Christ?

h. The Apostle answers that he believes in perpetual progress:

> "I say that man was made to grow, not stop;
> That help, he needed once, and needs no more,
> Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn:
> For he hath new needs, and new helps to these." [2]

But God and Truth suffer no change; man's apprehension of God changes, and then whatever helped him to that new apprehension falls away no longer needed.[3] Minds develop, being at first "spoon-fed with truth." At one stage, miracles are an aid to faith, but the mind goes on to a point where it needs no such crude and elementary help.[4] The acceptance of the truth as to Christ's Person is the way into the solution of the questions that beset our thoughts:

> "I say, the acknowledgement of God in Christ
> Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the earth and out of it,
> And has so far advanced thee to be wise." [5]

i. Now, argues the Apostle:

> "I say, this is death and the sole death,
> When a man's loss comes to him from his gain,
> Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,
> And lack of love from love made manifest." [6]

[1] P. 508, ll. 4–56.
[2] P. 508, ll. 59–62.
[3] P. 508, ll. 64–69.
[4] P. 509, ll. 16–44.
[5] P. 509, ll. 37–40.
[6] P. 509, ll. 45–48.

He then traces step by step man's progressive recognition of God: First the recognition of *might*, then *will* behind the might, then *love* behind the will and might. And each of these realities which are in God has a correspondent in human nature. Turning back into any stage of the process passed is death, *i.e.* life may be said to be only correspondence with present reality and any measure of failure of such correspondence is, in just that measure, death:

> "That man has turned round on himself and stands,
> Which in the course of nature is, to die." [1]

Now Christ is the Love of God, and the man who rejects Christ is caught in this illogical position, viz. that he

> "knows himself,
> That he must love and would be loved again,
> Yet, owning his own love that proveth Christ,
> Rejecteth Christ through very need of Him." [2]

j. The imaginary objector against whom St. John is arguing asks: [3] Why didn't you tell the story of Christ's life in such a way as to preclude doubt? Why all this lack of exactness and scientific proof? Doesn't your work allow room for the conviction that the story is simply the vehicle for a doctrine which you want to teach,[4] as is admittedly the case with the story of Prometheus? St. John answers [5] that no man's work is perfect. Man is neither God nor beast, but a creature who is struggling

> "from old to new,
> From vain to real, from mistake to fact,
> From what once seemed good to what now proves best." [6]

[1] P. 509, ll. 61, 62. [2] P. 509, l. 71–p. 510, l. 2. [3] P. 510, ll. 5–30.

[4] The Fourth Gospel is written confessedly with purpose to convince men of a view of Christ's Person and to lead them into faith in Him. With this purpose the incidents are chosen. See Jn. 20:30, 31.

[5] P. 510, ll. 31 sqq. [6] P. 510, ll. 36–38.

The only attitude that befits man is for him in humility to do what he can to see things aright and to follow the truth. So the Apostle has sincerely done what he could, shaping his story of Christ to "pluck the blind ones back from the abyss." [1]

[1] See p. 511, l. 55, in which he describes his life-service.

X

PARACELSUS

Pp. 15–69

Paracelsus was published in 1835. Browning was then 23 years old, — *i.e.* his dedication of the book is dated March 15, 1835, and his twenty-third birthday was the May 7th following. The poem is remarkable for its *maturity of thought*, coming from so young a man. It contains a thorough discussion of the question: What makes life worth while? what is the chief end of existence? what should a man's great life-purpose be? The poem was considerably revised in later editions,[1] and many changes in wording were introduced, but no modification in the philosophy. Once for all, Browning settled his philosophy of life. He has worked out the whole problem in the conversations between Paracelsus and his friends.

I. The Historical Paracelsus

1. At the end of the poem,[2] Browning has himself furnished a sketch of the life of Paracelsus, which he has translated from the *Biographie Universelle,* Paris, 1822,

[1] See Geo. Willis Cooke, *Guide-Book to the Works of Browning*, Boston, 1893, pp. 264–279. Mr. Cooke gives a table of changed readings, additions, and omissions, compiled from a comparison of the text of 1835 with that of 1888. He does not indicate at what time the various changes were introduced.

[2] Pp. 65–69.

and has, with keen historical instinct, added six notes,[1] besides several footnotes. Browning's notes are to corroborate statements in that article or to correct them. He appeals to some of the sources of information as to Paracelsus' life, which sources he quotes in the original Latin, and estimates their reliability. We thus see how early in his life-work the sound historical scholarship of Browning had its foundations.

2. Moreover, the Editor of our *Globe Edition* has prefixed an account of Paracelsus' life at the opening of the poem. This agrees as to dates usually with the Encyclopædia of Biography quoted by Browning except for the date of birth, which in Browning's authority is put 1493, while in our editorial introduction it is put broadly "about 1490."

3. An inquiry as to Paracelsus' life[2] develops the following facts:

a. It is not necessary to say "about 1490." The day of

[1] Some of Browning's notes are wrong, as *e.g.* note 1, in which he discusses the name *Bombast.*

[2] See Franz Hartmann, M.D., *The Life of Paracelsus and the Substance of his Teaching*, London, 1886, New York, 1891; *same*, second edition revised and enlarged, New York, no date, — in this 2d ed. the life of Paracelsus covers pp. 1–23, and is followed by a list of his works, and then by a discussion of his science and philosophy; Rudolph Steiner, Ph.D., *Mystics of the Renaissance and their Relation to Modern Thought*, tr. by Bertram Keightley, M.A., New York, 1911, pp. 196–222; A. E. Waite, *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus* now for the first time translated into English, edited with Biographical Preface &c., 2 vols., London, 1894, *same*, new and limited ed., 2 vols., edited by Dr. L. W. de Laurence, Chicago, 1910; Franz Strunz, Ph.D., *Theophrastus Paracelsus, sein Leben und seine Persönlichkeit*, Leipzig, 1903 This last mentioned book is by far the best thing I have found for the life of Paracelsus. It is careful and exact, and contains several portraits and facsimiles.

Of encyclopædia articles the best are: *Paracelsus* in *Enc. Brit.*, 11th ed. (article not signed); *Paracelsus* in *Catholic Enc.* (article signed by Leopold Senfelder, Teacher of the History of Medicine in the University of Vienna).

Paracelsus' birth is exactly known — *Nov. 10, 1493.*[1] And the day of his death is exactly known — Sept. 24, 1541.[2]

b. His name is given in a great variety of forms, — most commonly nowadays as *Philippus Aureolus Paracelsus.*[3] It was originally *Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim.*[4] The usual explanation is that he took the name *Paracelsus* (*i.e.* beside Celsus, or the equal of Celsus) because of his opinion of his own ability.[5] He is familiarly called in Browning's poem "Aureole."

c. He was born at the *Sihlbrücke*[6] near *Einsiedeln*, in the

[1] So Strunz, *Theophrastus Paracelsus*, p. 27. Senfelder, *Cath. Enc.*, follows Strunz. Hartmann, p. 2, gives birthdate Nov. 26, 1493. Many give Dec. 17, 1493. The question is not about the year, but about the month and day. Strunz in his footnote appeals to Sudhoff's article "Zu Hohenheims Geburtstag" and adds: "Die Annahme des 17. Dez. als Geburtstag ist nach Sudhoffs Forschungen unwahrscheinlich. Vielfach wird aber dieses Datum noch nachgedruckt."

[2] Strunz, p. 76. The day frequently given is Sept. 23, but on Paracelsus' tombstone the date is plainly Sept. 24. Strunz prints the inscription on this page.

[3] An engraving of Paracelsus (reproduced by Strunz, opposite p. 74) signed with monogram A H (Augustin Hirschvogel, see Strunz, p. 126) and with date 1540, gives the name as *Aureolus Theophrastus ab Hohenheim.* The inscription on the oil-painting (Strunz, frontispiece), date and painter unknown (Strunz, p. 126), now in the Royal Gallery at Schleissheim near Munich, gives the name as *Theophrastus Paracelsus.* The epitaph at Salzburg reads *Philippus Theophrastus* (Strunz, pp. 27, 76). And so on.

[4] Or as it was often Latinized, *Theophrastus Bombastus ab* (or *ex*) *Hohenheim.*

[5] But his letter to Erasmus (reproduced in autograph facsimile by Strunz between pp. 46 and 47 and printed on pp. 117 and 118) is signed simply *Theophrastus.* In many other places he puts himself down as *Theophrastus von Hohenheim* or *Theophrastus ex Hohenheim* (see Strunz, pp. 42, 51, 55).

[6] Literally the *Sihlbridge, i.e.* a village so named because it is at a bridge over the river *Sihl.* Baedeker, *Switzerland*, 4th English ed., p. 297, calls it "the *Teufelsbrücke* which spans the Sihl," and adds: "The celebrated empiric and alchemist Paracelsus is said to have been born here." He reckons it at 3¾ miles from Einsiedeln.

canton of *Schwyz*, Switzerland.[1] Schwyz is one of the "four Forest Cantons," and has altogether a population of about 50,000. Einsiedeln, its largest town, has now (census of 1900) a population of about 8,500. It is 27 miles northeast of the city of Lucerne and 25 miles by the railroad southeast of Zürich.

d. Paracelsus died in the city of Salzburg, in Austria. He was buried in the churchyard of St. Sebastian, but in 1752 his bones were removed to the tomb where they now lie, in the porch of St. Sebastian's Church.

e. His father was the learned Wilhelm Bombast von Hohenheim, physician to the monastery at Einsiedeln. He moved to Villach in Carinthia, Austria, about 1502, where later he became City-physician. It is almost certain that he was of the noble family of Bombast[2] whose ancestral seat was the castle *Hohenheim* near Stuttgart, in Würtemberg. Hence the family name Bombast *von Hohenheim*. This castle was in the possession of the family up to 1409. His wife (whom he married in 1491 or 1492) was of the Ochsener family of Einsiedeln.

f. Paracelsus' first teacher was his father.[3] He mentions a number of other early teachers.[3] He studied at the University of Basel[4] from the age of sixteen on, but not long. He studied chemistry under the renowned Johannes Trithemius,[5] who was at that time Abbot of the Monastery

[1] Strunz, p. 27: "Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim wurde am 10. November des Jahres 1493 an der Sihlbrücke bei Einsiedeln in dem Kanton Schwyz geboren."

[2] Strunz, p. 28.

[3] Strunz, p. 29, quotes Paracelsus' words on these points.

[4] French *Bâle*. The city is on the northern edge of Switzerland. Its university was founded in 1460.

[5] Johannes Trithemius (German, *Tritheim* or *Trittenheim*), born Feb. 1, 1462, died Dec. 13, 1516. In 1485 he became Abbot of the Monastery of Sponheim, near Kreuznach. This position he resigned in 1506, and was soon

of St. Jakob at Würzburg, in Bavaria. Paracelsus gained his knowledge of metallurgy at the mines owned, or rather operated by the Fugger family[1] in the Tyrol. He became a physician. He travelled widely and visited most of the universities of Europe. At one time or another, he went over all parts of Germany and the Netherlands, as far north as Denmark, east to Hungary, south to Italy, and west to Spain, Portugal, France, and England.[2] Some believe that he went to Constantinople and even to Turkestan.[3]

g. In 1526 he was appointed City-physician and Professor in the University of Basel, but left the town two years later and resumed his wanderings. He was practically driven from Basel by the physicians whom he had antagonized.[4]

h. Of course, as was inevitable in that age, Paracelsus' chemistry was mixed up with alchemy, his astronomy with astrology, his medicine accompanied by magic, and so on.

after appointed Abbot of the Monastery of St. Jakob at Würzburg. See art. *Trithemius* in *Enc. Brit.*, 11th ed.

[1] This family, with its headquarters in Augsburg, became, from 1367 on, a financial power in Europe. Their business interests were developed in many directions. It was Jakob Fugger (born 1459, died 1525) who made so much money in mining. Paracelsus' experience at the mines was at Schwaz, some twenty miles northeast of Innsbruck, with Sigmund Fugger.

[2] Thus much is sure from Paracelsus' own references to his wanderings, quoted by Strunz, pp. 31–33.

[3] The way it is usually told is that Paracelsus was carried into Tartary as a prisoner, and that from Samarkand he went with the son of the Khan on an embassy to Constantinople.

[4] Things came to a crisis at the time of his quarrel with Canon Cornelius von Lichtenfels. The Canon, after being cured by Paracelsus, refused to pay the fee. Whereupon Paracelsus sued him. But the magistrate who heard the case held with the Canon, which so incensed Paracelsus that he expressed his mind freely as to such a perversion of justice. The resulting disturbance was, however, simply "the last straw." He had met already much jealousy and opposition.

It was commonly supposed that a *dæmon*, or familiar spirit, dwelt in the handle of his long sword. His system of philosophy was visionary and theosophical. He was intolerant and conceited.

i. But when all has been said against him, these things in his favor remain: He had something of the modern scientific spirit, viz. that of investigating for himself rather than being bound by tradition. He was in a certain sense "the father of modern chemistry." He holds an important place in medicine because of the impetus he gave to pharmaceutical science.[1] He did perform some remarkable cures. As the Editor of our *Globe Edition* points out, "It is asserted on his behalf that he discovered zinc, hydrogen gas, and the tincture of opium," but it is not certain that any one of these great discoveries is his. But in contrast to all the methods of studying in the line of chemistry and medicine in his day, he introduced the method of studying Nature at first hand. And this method is what has brought to Science her triumphs.[2]

4. Paracelsus was, of course, a contemporary of Martin Luther, Zwingli, and the struggle of the Protestant Reformation, and these men and events are reflected somewhat in Browning's poem.

[1] Senfelder's estimate (art. *Paracelsus* in *Cath. Enc.*) is just and temperate: "He may be taken as the founder of the modern materia medica, and pioneer of scientific chemistry."

[2] The *Enc. Brit.*, 11th ed., article on *Paracelsus* says: "Probably, therefore, his positive services are to be summed up in this wide application of chemical ideas to pharmacy and therapeutics; his indirect and possibly greater services are to be found in the stimulus, the revolutionary stimulus, of his ideas about method and general theory."

II. The Scenes Presented in Browning's Poem

1. Browning's treatment of Paracelsus he himself explains in his note at the end of the poem:[1]

> "The liberties I have taken with my subject are very trifling; and the reader may slip the foregoing scenes between the leaves of any memoir of Paracelsus he pleases, by way of commentary."

Few writers of this sort of a poem would propose to have their work subjected to such a test.

2. The poem is made up of *dialogue* presented in five scenes, *i.e.* five glimpses of Paracelsus in the course of his life. The date of each scene is carefully given by Browning.

Scene I. *Paracelsus Aspires.* He is sitting and talking with his friends Festus and Michal, in a garden at Würzburg, Bavaria. It is the evening before he starts on his travels. The year is 1512. Paracelsus is hardly twenty years old, full of hope, courage, and devotion to the search for *Knowledge.* To *know* shall be the great purpose of his life.

Scene II. *Paracelsus Attains.* Nine years have passed, spent in his eager search for knowledge. It is now the year 1521. He sits in the house of a Greek conjurer in the city of Constantinople. Paracelsus has sacrificed everything to the acquiring of knowledge and he has *attained.* He has amassed great knowledge, but is entirely unsatisfied. He feels that his life has failed, and the old adage runs in his head:[2]

> "Time fleets, youth fades, life is an empty dream."

It is in this house that he meets Aprile, a poet, who has set *Love* as the goal of his ambitions:

> "I would LOVE infinitely, and be loved!"[3]

His life, too, has failed and he dies here to-day.

[1] P. 65, 1st col. [2] P. 26, l. 19.

[3] P. 30, l. 3. Cf. Paracelsus' words, l. 2: "I am he that aspired to KNOW."

Scene III. *Paracelsus.* The bare word is significant — the pause in the midst of his life, 1526, five years after he was in Constantinople. Now he is the new professor in Basel, and his old friend Festus stops to see him. Their conversation shows us Paracelsus entirely unsatisfied, scorning his popularity, knowing how hollow it is, and finding no comfort in his knowledge, but gathering his strength for another effort to find satisfaction.

Scene IV, *Paracelsus Aspires* again, is two years later, at an inn at Colmar, in Alsace. Paracelsus has just fled from Basel and now has sent for Festus. The conversation shows a new aspiration in Paracelsus: He burns with his old thirst for knowledge, but he will not scorn joy as he has done, but will drink his fill of that.

Scene V. *Paracelsus Attains* again, — 1541, thirteen years after the preceding scene. He lies unconscious in the Hospital of St. Sebastian in Salzburg, in Austria. His old friend Festus is beside him. And when Paracelsus at last rouses up, when at last he speaks of the years of his life, he tells Festus that not in knowledge alone, and not in love alone, is found life's fulfillment, but in knowledge and love together. This truth has grown upon him ever since he met Aprile in Constantinople; it finds now its fullest expression in the hour of his death.

III. The Literary Quality of the Poem

1. The style is remarkably simple and easy, and the poem abounds in what Tennyson would have called "large, divine, and comfortable words." [1]

2. One of the best of the literary characteristics is the

[1] Tennyson, *The Coming of Arthur*, (*Works*, Globe Ed., 1907, p. 307):

"With large, divine, and comfortable words,
Beyond my tongue to tell thee."

beauty of expression in regard to Nature or of similes from Nature, — all set forth with extraordinary vividness. Hardly less striking are the figures of speech derived from human life. Since "seeing is believing," let me repeat a hundred lines from almost as many different parts of the poem, — a hundred lines which it would be difficult to match in any single piece of English Literature.[1]

a. In Scene I, in the garden at Würzburg:

P. 16, l. 1, Autumn —

"Its bleak wind, hankering after pining leaves."

l. 11,

"Nor blame those creaking trees bent with their fruit."

l. 28,

"Yon painted snail with his gay shell of dew."

P. 17, ll. 4, 5, referring to Trithemius' lecture room —

"In that dim chamber where the noon-streaks peer,
Half-frightened by the awful tomes around."

ll. 36, 37,

"A solitary brier the bank puts forth
To save our swan's nest floating out to sea."

P. 18, ll. 75–77, just like Browning's spirit —

"the letting go
His shivered sword, of one about to spring
Upon his foe's throat."

P. 20, ll. 41–43,

"Writes the sea
The secret of her yearning in vast caves
Where yours will fall the first of human feet?"

[1] The fact, already pointed out, of Browning's revision of this poem should be borne in mind.

P. 20, ll. 80–82, the spirit that stirred Paracelsus —

"the breath so light
Upon my eyelids, and the fingers light
Among my hair."

P. 21, ll. 22, 23, very forceful —

"as who should dare
Pluck out the angry thunder from its cloud."

ll. 31–33,

"Like some knight traversing a wilderness,
Who, on his way, may chance to free a tribe
Of desert-people from their dragon-foe."

ll. 46, 47, as he looked at the world —

"I soon distinguished here and there a shape
Palm-wreathed and radiant."

ll. 58, 59,

"Then came a slow
And strangling failure."

ll. 68, 69,

"A mighty power was brooding, taking shape
Within me."

P. 22, ll. 51, 52,

"a dark and groaning earth
Given over to a blind and endless strife."

ll. 63–65, persisting to the end —

"Nay, Festus, when but as the pilgrims faint
Through the drear way, do you expect to see
Their city dawn amid the clouds afar?"

P. 23, ll. 23, 24, Festus says:

"I would encircle me with love, and raise
A rampart of my fellows."

P. 24, ll. 16, 17, it is the evening before Paracelsus starts out —

"See, the great moon! and ere the mottled owls
Were wide awake, I was to go."

P. 25, ll. 13, 14,

"Thus was life scorned; but life
Shall yet be crowned."

ll. 41–45, as Paracelsus is about to go —

"Are there not . . .
Two points in the adventure of the diver,
One — when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,
One — when, a prince, he rises with his pearl?
Festus, I plunge!"

b. In Scene II, in Constantinople:

P. 25, ll. 46, 47,

"Over the waters in the vaporous West
The sun goes down as in a sphere of gold."

ll. 55–57,

"'Tis as yon cloud
Should voyage unwrecked o'er many a mountain-top
And break upon a molehill."

P. 26, l. 31,

"Was it the light wind sang it o'er the sea?"

P. 27, ll. 8–10,

"There was a time
When yet this wolfish hunger after knowledge
Set not remorselessly love's claims aside."

l. 35,

"And since that morn all life has been forgotten."

ll. 74, 75,

"Let me weep
My youth and its brave hopes, all dead and gone."

P. 28, ll. 16, 17,

"And I am left with gray hair, faded hands,
And furrowed brow." [1]

ll. 46, 47, addressed to God, expressing the splendid audacity of Paracelsus' ambition:

"To crown my mortal forehead with a beam
From thine own blinding crown."

P. 30, ll. 27, 28, soon after Aprile enters, Paracelsus says:

"How he stands
With eve's last sunbeam staying on his hair!"

ll. 32–34,

"The painful fruitless striving of the brow
And enforced knowledge of the lips, firm-set
In slow despondency's eternal sigh."

ll. 70, 71, from Aprile's part in the conversation, as are also the next five passages quoted:

"Lakes which, when morn breaks on their quivering bed,
Blaze like a wyvern flying round the sun."

P. 31, l. 11,

"Even as a luminous haze links star to star."

l. 79, in life's search, journeying sometimes

"Past tracts of milk-white minute blinding sand." [2]

P. 32, ll. 20, 21,

"As one spring wind unbinds the mountain snow
And comforts violets in their hermitage."

[1] Notice the "faded hands." Could any word tell the story like that word *faded?*

[2] This line reads "tracts" in the author's text of 1835 and 1888; misprinted "tracks" in the Globe Ed.

P. 32, ll. 55, 56,

"As whirling snow-drifts blind a man who treads
A mountain ridge, with guiding spear, through storm."

P. 33, ll. 24, 25,

"God is the perfect poet,
Who in his person acts his own creations."

c. In Scene III, at Basel:

P. 33, ll. 60–62, Paracelsus inquires about Michal:

"And Michal's face
Still wears that quiet and peculiar light
Like the dim circlet floating round a pearl?"

P. 34, l. 17,

"Shutting out fear with all the strength of hope."

P. 37, l. 63,

"As in a flying sphere of turbulent light."

P. 40, l. 8, a curious simile but very accurate —

"Chill mushrooms coloured like a corpse's cheek."

l. 72, Festus assures Paracelsus:

"The cloud that wraps you will have disappeared."

P. 42, ll. 53, 54, 57, 61, Paracelsus says:

"You know not what temptation is, nor how
'Tis like to ply man in the sickliest part.
There is not one sharp volley shot at us:
We are assailed to life's extremest verge."

l. 70, the splendid grit of Paracelsus —

"But though I cannot soar, I do not crawl."

P. 43, l. 23,

"Measure your mind's height by the shade it casts."

P. 45, ll. 27, 28,

"'Tis the melancholy wind astir
Within the trees."

ll. 30, 31,

"The night, late strewn with clouds and flying stars,
Is blank and motionless."

ll. 60, 61,

"gone, shut from me for ever,
Like a dead friend safe from unkindness more."

ll. 62, 63,

"See, morn at length. The heavy darkness seems
Diluted, grey and clear without the stars."

ll. 66–68,

"and from the East, fuller and fuller,
Day, like a mighty river, flowing in;
But clouded, wintry, desolate and cold."

d. In Scene IV, at the inn in Colmar:

P. 49, ll. 19–21, Paracelsus speaks of his spirit's

"rapt communion
With the tumultuous past, the teeming future,
Glorious with visions of a full success."

ll. 35–37,

"nor shall the present —
A few dull hours, a passing shame or two,
Destroy the vivid memories of the past."

P. 54, l. 20, Michal, whom Festus married, has died, and Paracelsus says:

"And Michal sleeps among the roots and dews."

e. In Scene V, when Paracelsus is dying in Salzburg:

P. 54, ll. 30, 31,

"The lamp burns low, and through the casement-bars
Grey morning glimmers feebly."

P. 54, ll. 34, 35, Festus speaking of Paracelsus' condition:

"Those fixed eyes, . . .
Like torch-flame choked in dust."

P. 55, ll. 72–74, Paracelsus imagining that he has heard Aprile there:

"If they have filled him full
With magical music, as they freight a star
With light."

P. 57, ll. 7–10, Festus referring to Paracelsus' mind:

"A light
Will struggle through these thronging words at last,
As in the angry and tumultuous West
A soft star trembles through the drifting clouds."

ll. 40, 41, Paracelsus referring to the possibility of content:

"Just as some stream foams long among the rocks
But after glideth glassy to the sea."

P. 58, ll. 18–20,

"It makes my heart sick to behold you crouch
Beside your desolate fane: the arches dim,
The crumbling columns grand against the moon."

l. 47,

"Where the blood leaps like an imprisoned thing."

P. 62, ll. 42, 43,

"The wroth sea's waves are edged
With foam, white as the bitten lip of hate."

ll. 50–53,

"Rare verdure
Buds tenderly upon rough banks, between
The withered tree-roots and the cracks of frost,
Like a smile striving with a wrinkled face."

P. 62, ll. 58, 59,

"The lark
Soars up and up, shivering for very joy."[1]

P. 63, ll. 13, 14,

"The winds
Are henceforth voices."

l. 17,

"The herded pines commune and have deep thoughts."[2]

ll. 27–30,

"The morn hath enterprise, deep quiet droops
With evening, triumph takes the sunset hour,
Voluptuous transport ripens with the corn
Beneath a warm moon like a happy face."

P. 65, ll. 14–18, as Paracelsus dies:

"If I stoop
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
It is but for a time; I press God's lamp
Close to my breast; its splendour, soon or late,
Will pierce the gloom: I shall emerge one day."

These passages illustrate the beauty of thought and felicity of expression in *Paracelsus*. The poem has these qualities to an extent hard to find equalled anywhere except in Browning's own later writings.[3]

[1] Nothing could describe the lark's movement and song so well as *shivering for very joy*.

[2] Anyone who recalls the group of pines on top of a knoll, how they look as if they had been "rounded up" at that spot, will see the whole picture in the phrase "the *herded* pines."

[3] We need to remind ourselves again of Browning's extensive revision of the wording of *Paracelsus* in later editions, so that we shall not fall into the error of crediting all the literary excellence of the poem to its author at the age of twenty-three.

IV. The Philosophy of Browning in Paracelsus

Our study of Browning's Philosophy in *Paracelsus* will be under four heads:

1. The Unconquerable Soul.
2. The Secret of Human Life — Is it Knowledge or Love?
3. The Realization of God's Part in Human Affairs.
4. "The Power of an Endless Life."

1. First, then, *the unconquerable soul* of Paracelsus, — which is, of course, the unconquerable soul of Robert Browning, — which is, of course, the unconquerable soul that all of us ought to have.

a. Paracelsus begins with a high purpose — "God's great commission," [1]

> "The path which God's will seems to authorise." [2]

It is the devotion to the pursuit of *knowledge* alone: he dares aspire to *know*.[3]

b. For this purpose, he left "with a tumultuous heart" his "childhood's home" and came to Würzburg to study under Trithemius.[4]

c. But now he feels the time is come for him to strike out for himself, and he will not allow himself to be dissuaded from it. He is "strong and full of hope."[5] He is "young, happy and free."[6]

(1) He scorns the past and its teachers. Urged by Festus, "At least accept the light they lend," [7] he answers:

> "Shall I still sit beside
> Their dry wells, with a white lip and filmed eye?" [8]

[1] P. 17, l. 41.
[2] P. 17, l. 71.
[3] P. 19, l. 12; cf. p. 30, l. 2.
[4] P. 18, ll. 49–52.
[5] P. 17, l. 54.
[6] P. 20, l. 8.
[7] P. 22, l. 48.
[8] P. 22, ll. 55, 56.

"The labours and the precepts of old time,
I have not lightly disesteemed. But, friends,
Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fulness." [1]

(2) He has a great interest in humanity. He remembers:

"what oppressive joy was mine
When life grew plain, and I first viewed the thronged,
The everlasting concourse of mankind!" [2]

He wants to see the race elevated as a whole:

"Make no more giants, God,
But elevate the race at once! We ask
To put forth just our strength, our human strength,
All starting fairly, all equipped alike,
Gifted alike, all eagle-eyed, true-hearted —
See if we cannot beat thine angels yet!" [3]

This agrees with what he feels at the close of his life:

"So glorious is our nature, so august
Man's inborn uninstructed impulses,
His naked spirit so majestical!" [4]

And his expectation then, likening the progress of the race to the coming out of the stars, that there will be a time

"when the host
Is out at once to the despair of night,
When all mankind alike is perfected." [5]

(3) But in the beginning of his life-plan he has no idea of being "lost in the ranks" of common humanity, "eluding destiny." [6] He sets his heart on something other than attaining "the general welfare of his kind." [7] He says:

[1] P. 24, ll. 26–31.
[2] P. 21, ll. 4–6.
[3] P. 24, ll. 81–86.
[4] P. 62, ll. 2–4.
[5] P. 63, ll. 41–53.
[6] P. 17, l. 51.
[7] P. 19, l. 34.

"If I can serve mankind
'Tis well; but there our intercourse must end:
I never will be served by those I serve." [1]

He will leave *love* out of account and follow only *knowledge*. He is warned:

"How can that course be safe which from the first
Produces carelessness to human love?" [2]

He is warned of the danger of becoming

"A monstrous spectacle upon the earth:
A being knowing not what love is." [3]

But he does not fear. He has from childhood been "possessed by a fire." [4] He has within him a "fierce energy," [5] a "restless irresistible force." [6] He believes that he can bring "new hopes," "new light." [7] He goes without thought of reward:

"My course allures for its own sake, its sole
Intrinsic worth." [8]

A voice has spoken to him and called him to *know*,

"not for knowing's sake,
But to become a star to men for ever." [9]

He is ready, brave, unflinching:

"I go to prove my soul!
I see my way as birds their trackless way.
I shall arrive! what time, what circuit first,
I ask not: but unless God send his hail
Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,
In some time, his good time, I shall arrive:
He guides me and the bird. In his good time!" [10]

[1] P. 23, ll. 1–3.
[2] P. 23, ll. 9, 10.
[3] P. 23, ll. 67, 69.
[4] P. 20, ll. 66, 67.
[5] P. 19, l. 65.
[6] P. 19, l. 70.
[7] P. 20, ll. 9–16.
[8] P. 23, ll. 39, 40.
[9] P. 22, ll. 1, 2.
[10] P. 22, ll. 34–40.

d. But sitting in Constantinople and reviewing the nine years of struggle, he knows that he has *attained* and *failed.* His *soul* is not satisfied. But does he give up? *Not he.* His soul is unconquerable. *He has done the thing he planned to do:*

> "I have subdued my life to the one purpose
> Whereto I ordained it;" [1]
>
> "I have made my life consist of one idea." [2]

True, this has brought him naught but disappointment,

> "grey hair, faded hands,
> And furrowed brow." [3]

His life is a "parched sand-waste." [4] He exclaims:

> "Oh, bitter; very bitter!
> And more bitter,
> To fear a deeper curse, an inner ruin." [5]

But he is not giving up. The alluring thought of *rest,*[6] of being lost among his fellows,[7] he puts away,[8] and prays God only to keep him from madness:

> "Spare my mind alone!
> All else I will endure. . . .
> Crush not my mind, dear God, though I be crushed!" [9]

He has no idea of giving up. He prays for strength whereby to fight:

> "Give but one hour of my first energy,
> Of that invincible faith, but only one!" [10]

e. Five years later, in Basel, his failure he feels still more keenly. So long he had followed the quest of knowledge that, when he tried to find love and joy, he could not:

[1] P. 26, ll. 72, 73.
[2] P. 27, l. 25.
[3] P. 28, ll. 16, 17.
[4] P. 27, l. 3.
[5] P. 27, ll. 71, 72.
[6] P. 26, ll. 32–40.
[7] P. 26, ll. 40 sqq.
[8] P. 26, ll. 46 sqq.
[9] P. 28, ll. 26, 27, 37.
[10] P. 28, ll. 53, 54.

"God! how I essayed
To live like that mad poet, for a while,
To love alone; and how I felt too warped
And twisted and deformed!" [1]

He cries out:

"How can I change my soul?" [2]
"I still must hoard and heap and class all truths
With one ulterior purpose: I must know!" [3]

It is too late to change the bent of his mind. But there is no satisfaction in it. He disparages what men might call his success. Michal had told him in the beginning that he would "succeed . . . and yet be wretched." He declares now:

"I have not been successful, and yet am
Most miserable." [4]

He says:

"You may have it told in broken sobs one day,
And scalding tears ere long." [5]

He says:

"You know my hopes;
I am assured, at length, those hopes were vain;
That truth is just as far from me as ever
That I have thrown my life away." [6]
"Love, hope, fear, faith — these make humanity;
These are its sign and note and character,
And these I have lost! — gone, shut from me for ever,
Like a dead friend safe from unkindness more!" [7]

But does he give up? *Not he.* Note his unconquerable soul:

"I am
A man yet: I need never humble me.
I would have been — something, I know not what;
But though I cannot soar, I do not crawl." [8]

[1] P. 41, ll. 72–75.
[2] P. 41, l. 66.
[3] P. 41, ll. 83, 84.
[4] P. 35, ll. 74 sqq.; p. 36, ll. 64, 65.
[5] P. 37, ll. 36, 37.
[6] P. 39, ll. 48–51.
[7] P. 45, ll. 58–61.
[8] P. 42, ll. 67–70.

He is but pausing to take breath. The professor's chair in Basel is not his goal.[1] His soul must be satisfied.

f. Two years later, out of the chair in the University, he is ready to begin life again, with iron determination, with his old purposes but with new methods of pursuing them:

> "I
> Am merely setting out once more, embracing
> My earliest aims again! . . .
> The aims — not the old means." [2]

> "I will fight the battle out; a little spent
> Perhaps, but still an able combatant.
> You look at my grey hair and furrowed brow?
> But I can turn even weakness to account." [3]

Even though he foresees that there will be no satisfaction in it, that the morn will dawn and show the discovery in his night's toil worthless — the passage beginning

> "for night is come,
> And I betake myself to study again," [4]

one of the most remarkable passages in the poem — still he will not give up:

> "This life of mine
> Must be lived out and a grave thoroughly earned." [5]

He is like a gladiator ready for the fight, and with bitter sarcasm he taunts the rabble to take

> "the snug back-seats
> And leave a clear arena for the brave
> About to perish for your sport." [6]

[1] In speaking of Paracelsus' movements as indicated in the poem, we must, of course, adopt the plan of Paracelsus' life which Browning has in mind. And Browning associates with Paracelsus at Basel his lecturing in the University more than his being also city-physician. See *e.g.* p. 35, ll. 31–49; p. 47, ll. 12–67.

[2] P. 48, ll. 30–32, 35. [3] P. 49, ll. 38–41. [4] P. 50, ll. 62–79.
[5] P. 50, ll. 38, 39. [6] P. 54, ll. 25–28.

g. Thirteen years more, and Paracelsus is dying; and his mind wanders at first, but always with the same unquenchable aspirations, — he is no nearer surrender than in his youth:

> "Rather give
> The supernatural consciousness of strength
> Which fed my youth! Only one hour of that,
> With thee to help." [1]

> "Well, onward though alone! Small time remains,
> And much to do." [2]

And then as his wandering mind clears and he realizes that the end is come, he struggles to his feet and makes Festus put on him his gown and sword again,[3] and there he gives his summary about human life and destiny, the fruitage of all his struggle, and *dies without surrender.* The same invincible courage:

> "If I stoop
> Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
> It is but for a time:
> I shall emerge one day." [4]

h. Such is the human soul as Robert Browning would have it — *the unconquerable soul.*

2. *The Secret of Human Life — Is it Knowledge or Love?*

a. The quotations already made have set before us clearly Paracelsus' life-purpose. We need not repeat them nor quote others like them. Paracelsus devotes his life to *knowledge* and leaves love out. And knowledge could not satisfy his soul. It is too late when he sees his mistake. His mental habits are formed. He has missed life where he thought he would find it. And the realization of how he has failed of life's fulfillment haunts him all his days, and runs

[1] P. 57, ll. 70–74.
[2] P. 57, l. 82–p. 58, l. 1.
[3] P. 61, ll. 10–24.
[4] P. 65, ll. 14–15, 18.

in his delirium on his death-bed. His broken words there show the thought which has tortured him all the years since he saw Aprile die in Constantinople and learned too late that his putting love out of his life had starved his soul. On his death-bed he cries:

> "Cruel! I seek her [1] now — I kneel — I shriek —
> I clasp her vesture — but she fades, still fades;
> And she is gone; sweet human love is gone!" [2]

It is significant that his mind constantly reverts to Aprile and he thinks Aprile is there with him. This shows how much Aprile has been in his thoughts throughout the years. He imagines now that he has heard Aprile all night; he has tried to get to Aprile but could not for a cold hand on his breast.[3]

> "Ask him if Aprile
> Knows as he Loves — if I shall Love and Know." [4]

b. For Aprile, the poet, had for his great life-purpose *love*, and left knowledge out:

> "I would LOVE infinitely and be loved." [5]

He would live in the lives of others and make their joy his own. But he too failed, and died years ago in Constantinople.

c. These two are the only great life-purposes with which Browning deals in the poem. The two key-words KNOW and LOVE he frequently prints in small capitals in scenes I and II, to indicate to the reader their nature.[6] Browning shows how much these two involve: *love* leading to *joy*, *knowledge* leading to *power*. It is well to bear this in mind,

[1] *i.e.* Love, as is plain from the third line quoted.
[2] P. 57, ll. 15–17.
[3] P. 55, ll. 67–70, 78.
[4] P. 55, ll. 76, 77.
[5] P. 30, l. 3; cf. l. 38.
[6] *e.g.* p. 19, l. 12; p. 24, l. 35; p. 30, ll. 2, 3; p. 32, l. 74.

for Browning, having once shown that joy comes from love and that power comes from knowledge, sometimes speaks of Aprile's life-purpose as joy and Paracelsus' life-purpose as power. It is love bringing joy, knowledge bringing power.

d. And finding that each has failed, Browning puts his resultant conclusion that Paracelsus and Aprile are "halves of one dissevered world" and that the *lover* must *know* and the *knower* must *love*, before they can be saved.[1] The true poise of life is an equilibrium between knowledge and love. Browning speaks through the dying lips of Paracelsus:

> "love preceding
> Power, and with much power, always much more love."[2]
>
> "Let men
> Regard me, and the poet dead long ago
> Who loved too rashly; and shape forth a third
> And better-tempered spirit, warned by both."[3]

That is, from the experience of one who followed knowledge and power too much and the experience of one who followed love and joy too much, we gather that the true life is the life poised with its just measure of knowledge and power balanced by its just measure of love and joy.

3. *The Realization of God's Part in Human Affairs.*

a. This is evident to even the most casual reader of the poem. The poem is saturated with the recognition of God. The appeal to Him in all moments of crisis is very striking, taking the form of sudden prayers.

b. Paracelsus' life-plans are begun, carried on, and ended in God, as far as he can understand what God's will is. This is the source of his confidence.

(1) He feels that a voice from "the Eternal Not Our-

[1] P. 33, ll. 10–13. [2] P. 94, ll. 61, 62. [3] P. 64, l. 89–p. 65, l. 3.

selves" has whispered to him and given him this thirst for knowledge,[1] and has promised him:

> "Be happy, my good soldier; I am by thee,
> Be sure, even to the end!" [2]

And Paracelsus will live his life feeling that an intimate tie connects him with our God,[3]

> " God helping, God directing everywhere." [4]
> "Be sure that God
> Ne'er dooms to waste the strength he deigns impart!" [5]
> "Be sure they sleep not whom God needs!" [6]

It is in God's guidance that he goes:

> "I go to prove my soul!
> I see my way as birds their trackless way.
> I shall arrive! what time, what circuit first,
> I ask not: but unless God send his hail
> Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,
> In some time, his good time, I shall arrive:
> He guides me and the bird. In his good time!" [7]

(2) In his disappointment and bitterness of soul, still it is to God that Paracelsus turns:

> "Yet God is good: I started sure of that,
> And why dispute it now?" [8]
> "God, that created all things, can renew!" [9]

At Basel, in his bitterness, he almost loses confidence. He speaks to Festus impatiently about

> "The constant talk men of your stamp keep up
> Of God's will, as they style it," [10]

[1] P. 21, l. 68–p. 22, l. 23.
[2] P. 22, ll. 19, 20.
[3] P. 19, l. 89–p. 20, l. 1.
[4] P. 20, l. 4.
[5] P. 19, ll. 75, 76.
[6] P. 19, l. 82.
[7] P. 22, ll. 34–40.
[8] P. 28, ll. 58, 59.
[9] P. 28, l. 69.
[10] P. 39, ll. 59, 60.

and says:

> "I know as much of any will of God
> As knows some dumb and tortured brute what Man,
> His stern lord, wills from the perplexing blows
> That plague him every way." [1]

But he soon recovers his old realization that God's will is the thing on which he must rely. Two years later he says:

> "I . . . take again
> My fluttering pulse for evidence that God
> Means good to me, will make my cause his own." [2]

He holds that each man doing his work, finding his self-fulfillment, filling his place in the world, is glorifying God:

> "'Tis vain to talk of forwarding
> God's glory otherwise;
> We are his glory; and if we be glorious,
> Is not the thing achieved?" [3]

(3) And in the closing scene, Paracelsus feels that his last speech is "God's message;" [4] and his "wretched cell" becomes "a shrine, for here God speaks to men" through him.[5] And when he dies, it is but going "joyous back to God." [6] Paracelsus' summary of the destiny of humanity and of God's joy in His universe is so complete that it is hard to quote it in fragments. With the eye of a seer, he comprehends

> "what God is, what we are,
> What life is — how God tastes an infinite joy
> In infinite ways — one everlasting bliss,
> From whom all being emanates, all power
> Proceeds, in whom is life for evermore." [7]

[1] P. 39, ll. 65–68.
[2] P. 50, ll. 81–83.
[3] P. 53, ll. 16, 17, 20, 21.
[4] P. 60, ll. 10, 11.
[5] P. 61, ll. 21–23.
[6] P. 61, l. 49.
[7] P. 62, ll. 25–29.

In each change of Nature,

"God renews
His ancient rapture." [1]

But when Man appears, a new meaning is in all Nature. Man is still in the process of developing, of coming into his own.

"But in completed man begins anew
A tendency to God." [2]

"For God is glorified in man." [3]

And as Paracelsus passes into the unknown Country, his triumphant words are:

"I press God's lamp
Close to my breast; its splendour, soon or late,
Will pierce the gloom." [4]

c. Festus' faith in God is hardly less strong than that of Paracelsus, and is even more beautiful. Notice Festus as he watches by Paracelsus' death-bed before Paracelsus rouses:

"God! Thou art love! I build my faith on that.
So doth thy right hand guide us through the world
Wherein we stumble." [5]

"Save him, dear God; it will be like thee: bathe him
In light and life." [6]

"I know thee, who hast kept my path, and made
Light for me in the darkness, tempering sorrow
So that it reached me like a solemn joy;
It were too strange that I should doubt thy love." [7]

"The quiet place beside thy feet,
Reserved for me, was ever in my thoughts." [8]

[1] P. 62, ll. 63, 64.
[2] P. 63, ll. 65, 66.
[3] P. 64, l. 8.
[4] P. 65, ll. 16–18.
[5] P. 55, ll. 9, 12, 13.
[6] P. 55, ll. 24, 25.
[7] P. 55, ll. 29–32.
[8] P. 55, ll. 35, 36.

When he tries to stimulate Paracelsus to say something, he rebukes himself:

"Better be mute and see what God shall send." [1]

And when Paracelsus does speak, Festus assures him:

"God shall take thee to his breast, dear spirit." [2]

And as the end draws near, then Festus' soul flames up in a cry to God for mercy on Paracelsus, — perhaps the finest devotion to a friend you'll find in Literature, and such a faith that he dares to challenge God in his friend's behalf:

"I am for noble Aureole, God!
I am upon his side, come weal or woe.
His portion shall be mine.
Reward him or I waive
Reward! If thou canst find no place for him,
He shall be king elsewhere, and I will be
His slave for ever. There are two of us." [3]

d. It should be added that both the faith of Paracelsus and the faith of Festus are simply Browning's own faith as to God's part in human affairs.

4. "*The Power of an Endless Life.*"

The confidence in Immortality shines out through the poem in every stage of Paracelsus' experience. In scene I, he says:

"See this soul of ours!
How it strives weakly in the child, is loosed
In manhood, clogged by sickness, back compelled
By age and waste, set free at last by death." [4]

Even in the bitter disappointment of later years, he exclaims:

"I had immortal feelings; such shall never
Be wholly quenched: no, no!" [5]

[1] P. 55, l. 64. [2] P. 59, l. 23.
[3] P. 59, ll. 47–49, 51–54. [4] P. 24, ll. 61–64. [5] P. 42, ll. 83, 84.

Festus says, in Paracelsus' disappointment:

> "It is our trust
> That there is yet another world to mend
> All error and mischance." [1]

And Paracelsus hardly feels then the comfort of that thought. But two years later, when he learns that Michal, who had become Festus' wife, is dead and buried, Paracelsus says:

> "Know, then, you did not ill to trust your love
> To the cold earth: I have thought much of it:
> For I believe we do not wholly die.
> I think the soul can never
> Taste death.
> Take it as my trust, she is not dead." [2]

And on his own death-bed, Paracelsus realizes:

> "Truly there needs another life to come!" [3]

and argues that, without its fulfillment beyond death, this life is

> "a poor cheat, a stupid bungle,
> A wretched failure." [4]

And Festus says to the dying man:

> "I bid thee enter gloriously thy rest." [5]

Paracelsus finds that it is only that "the storm of life subsides." [6] He says:

> "And this is death: I understand it all.
> New being waits me; new perceptions must
> Be born in me before I plunge therein;
> Which last is Death's affair; and while I speak,
> Minute by minute he is filling me
> With power: . . . my foot is on the threshold
> Of boundless life." [7]

[1] P. 45, ll. 39–41. [2] P. 54, ll. 9–11, 13, 14, 17. [3] P. 57, l. 76.
[4] P. 57, ll. 79, 80. [5] P. 59, l. 46.
[6] P. 60, l. 21. [7] P. 60, ll. 48–54.

And as his eyes close in death:

> "If I stoop
> Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
> It is but for a time; I press God's lamp
> Close to my breast; its splendour, soon or late,
> Will pierce the gloom: I shall emerge one day."[1]

[1] P. 65, ll. 14–18.

XI

PIPPA PASSES

Pp. 174–195

Pippa Passes was published in 1841, when Browning was 29 years old. It was the first in the series of eight pamphlets known as *Bells and Pomegranates*. When *Pippa Passes* was written, Browning was living in England but had made a journey to Italy in 1838, — a journey which contributed so much to *Sordello*, published in 1840. *Pippa Passes*, when it was finished, lay for some time in Browning's desk without a publisher. But he finally arranged with Edward Moxon to bring it out in pamphlet form, very cheap, sixteen pages, two columns to the page. The poem attracted little attention: few cared either to find fault with it or to commend it. And yet it is one of the daintiest and one of the most artistic works of the first half of the nineteenth century. As one of the best critics of Browning has said: "*Pippa Passes* will be an enduring strength and pleasure to all who love tenderly and think widely." [1]

I. The Place and the Date of the Action

1. The poem concerns itself with Asolo, a little walled city of 5000 people at the base of a hill in the province of Treviso, north Italy, 33 miles northwest of Venice. North Italy is famous for its silk industry. There was a silk mill

[1] Stopford A. Brooke, *The Poetry of Robert Browning*, New York, 1902, p. 241.

at Asolo when Browning wrote the poem, but it is no longer in operation. Browning visited the town in his first Italian travel and calls it "our delicious Asolo." [1] Forty years later he returned to it, and was very fond of the place to the end. He spent some weeks there the last autumn of his life. It is from the town of Asolo that he derives the name of his last volume of poems, *Asolando*, published on the day he died.

2. The date when the events in *Pippa Passes* take place can be approximately fixed:

a. The north of Italy is under Austrian rule, as is very evident from the presence of Austrian police at the end of *Noon*, and the conversation between Luigi and his mother in *Evening*. Note especially Luigi's reference to

> "How first the Austrians got these provinces,
> — Never by conquest but by cunning." [2]

In 1797 by the treaty of Campo-Formio, Austria gained possession of Venetia,[3] a large division of north Italy, but lost it to France in 1805. But by act of the Congress of Vienna (its final act dated June 9, 1815), Austria received all the Italian territory she had held and Lombardy [4] in addition. This gave her most of the provinces north of the Po, and made her the dominating power in all Italy. This position she continued to hold until she lost Lombardy in 1859 and Venetia in 1866.[5]

b. Prince Metternich-Winneburg is living:

> "Says he should like to be Prince Metternich." [6]

[1] In *Sordello*, p. 134, l. 55.

[2] P. 189, ll. 23, 25.

[3] Venetia comprises now eight provinces.

[4] Lombardy, lying to the west of Venetia, covers also eight provinces.

[5] Luigi's words, p. 189, l. 26, "That treaty whereby . . . " probably refer to the treaty of 1797, but may refer to the act of the Congress of Vienna: *i.e.* he may be far enough from 1815 so that his language in line 29 is appropriate.

[6] P. 187, ll. 23, 24.

This statesman, so hated by Italian patriots, was Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Austrian government from 1809 to 1848, and also Chancellor 1821–48. He died in Vienna in 1859. The fact that Browning's poem was written before 1841 narrows the possible range of date.

c. Francis I, Emperor of Austria, is the oppressor against whom Luigi is so stirred:

> "Old Franz,
> Come down and meet your fate." [1]

He became Emperor in 1792 and died in 1835. His death establishes the superior limit. That the date of the action falls in the closing years of his reign is plain from the fact that Luigi calls him *old* Franz [2] and Luigi's mother also speaks of him as old.[3]

d. Luigi is suspected of being connected with the Carbonari.[4] The Carbonari were a secret society of patriotic Italians, organized for the purpose of throwing off foreign domination. The society originated in Naples not long before 1814,[5] against the rule of the French there,[6] but soon spread all over Italy. The Carbonari movement was partly crushed by Austria, and was gradually absorbed into or superseded by Mazzini's "Young Italy" society organized in 1831.

[1] P. 187, ll. 83, 84.

[2] It cannot be another Francis meant. Franz Joseph I did not come to the throne till 1848.

[3] P. 187, ll. 93, 94.

[4] P. 187, 61–66.

[5] It was in 1814 that the Carbonari became known as an important revolutionary element in the kingdom of Naples. The edict issued Aug. 15, 1814, by Cardinals Consalvi and Pacca, against secret societies, was especially directed against this society.

[6] Joachim Murat, a French marshal, conspicuous for ability as a cavalry commander, brother-in-law of Napoleon Bonaparte, was king of Naples 1808–1815.

e. Silvio Pellico is considered by Luigi's mother as typical of the writers who are stirring up the people:

"Your Pellicos and writers for effect." [1]

Pellico was arrested by the Austrian government in 1820 and imprisoned till 1830. He died in 1854.

f. We gain no assistance from Luigi's mention of former conspirators against Austria:

"Andrea from his exile,
Pier from his dungeon, Gualtier from his grave!" [2]

Luigi gives the names familiarly, and it is difficult to identify them, and even if this could be done, it would hardly help to fix the date more closely.

g. The marks of time of most account are those touching the Emperor and Prince Metternich. These do not absolutely determine the date but they define it pretty narrowly, and the other more general indications are in harmony with them. We may say unhesitatingly that the scene of *Pippa Passes* is laid near the end of the reign of the Austrian Emperor Francis I. Probably some time 1830–35 is what Browning had in mind. Much of the information as to local conditions came from his visit of 1838, when things were, no doubt, in practically the same shape as a few years earlier.

II. The Structure of the Poem

1. Browning calls it, in the heading, "A Drama." This it can be called in a general way. It is made up of fragments, or scenes, whose only bond of unity is Pippa [3] herself, — glimpses of human lives touched by her passing.

2. There is an Introduction, four Scenes, and an Epilogue.

[1] P. 187, l. 88. [2] P. 189, ll. 10, 11.

[3] Pippa, "short for Felippa." See p. 187, ll. 32, 33; cf. p. 193, ll. 87-89.

a. It is New Year's day. Pippa springs out of bed, resolved to make the most of this her one holiday. She has to work in the silk mills all the rest of the year. She thinks of those whom she considers the happiest in Asolo. There is no reason why she cannot imagine herself in their place, each in turn, this New Year's holiday.

b. She goes out into the city, and in the course of the day, unknown to herself, her life, her presence, touches, one after another, the lives of these very men and women she had had in mind, and at critical moments her songs, as she passes where they are, bring them to momentous decisions or waken in them tremendous revulsions.

c. She comes back to her room at night, unconscious of what she has done and half dissatisfied with her holiday.

3. A curious, yet very reasonable, feature of the poem's construction is what we might call *interludes* between the scenes. Browning has placed such interludes at the end of scenes I, II, and III, to prepare us in each case for an understanding of the scene that follows. They are in the nature of conversations which we overhear as Pippa is passing from the point where her presence has come decisively into the lives of others to where its power is felt in another group. How these interludes help we quickly appreciate:

a. After Scene I, while Pippa is walking out toward a house that "looks over Orcana valley," we hear the art-students from Venice talking of the trick they are playing on Jules, who has been one of their number. Thus we understand the condition of affairs in Scene II, where Pippa's song as she passes at the critical moment brings Jules to a decision which defeats his fellow-students' plot and opens to him and Phene a new life.

b. And at the end of Scene II, as Pippa goes on from

this house to the ruined castle on the hill above Asolo, we hear the Austrian police talking with an English vagabond, Bluphocks, and get some hints not only of the police's attitude toward Luigi, which help us understand Scene III, but also a hint of certain designs on Pippa herself.

c. After Pippa's song in passing in Scene III has sealed Luigi's decision to do a bloody self-sacrificing deed, she passes on toward the Cathedral and the Bishop's brother's house, and we hear the poor outcast girls who are sitting on the Cathedral steps talking and giving us further inklings of the plot in which Pippa herself is unconsciously involved, — thus preparing us to understand Scene IV.

d. And in the fourth scene, as the Monsignor wavers before the dastardly suggestion of the Intendant, who plots to have Pippa seduced and ruined, she herself passes singing, and the Monsignor springs up and calls his attendants to gag and bind the villain. And so Pippa goes on homeward, never knowing that she has been the decisive influence in several lives that day and has saved herself.

It should be added that in each of the interludes, Pippa is naturally introduced: some of the speakers see her near or have noticed her as she went by a few minutes ago.[1]

III. The Songs in the Poem

1. There are only a few songs in the poem except Pippa's own.

a. There is a little snatch which Sebald sings at the beginning of Scene I:[2]

> "Let the watching lids wink!
> Day's a-blaze with eyes, think!
> Deep into the night, drink!"

[1] P. 182, ll. 71–73; p. 186, ll. 56, 57; p. 191, ll. 26–29, 46–51.
[2] P. 177, between ll. 9 and 10.

b. There is what Phene repeats to Jules in Scene II:[1]

"I am a painter who cannot paint,"

and so on. But this, although unlike the metre of the body of the poem, is not meant for a song.

c. And there is the sweet pitiful song sung by one of the poor girls sitting on the Cathedral steps — "You'll love me yet":[2]

"You'll love me yet! — and I can tarry
Your love's protracted growing:
June reared that bunch of flowers you carry,
From seeds of April's sowing.

I plant a heartful now: some seed
At least is sure to strike,
And yield — what you'll not pluck indeed,
Not love, but, may be, like.

You'll look at least on love's remains,
A grave's one violet:
Your look? — that pays a thousand pains.
What's death? You'll love me yet!"

2. But the famous songs in the poem are Pippa's own.

a. As she dresses herself in the morning, she sings the New Year's hymn:[3]

"All service ranks the same with God."

[1] P. 184, ll. 71–82; p. 185, ll. 1–7, 13–45.

[2] P. 191, ll. 34–45.

[3] P. 176, ll. 79–90. In these two stanzas the main idea is that it is the *quality* of the service that counts, not what men call its littleness or greatness; that with God there is only one standard, viz. *goodness;* that what we call "a small event" often costs as much pain to bring to pass as a so-called "great event"; that in a single deed, whether called "great" or "small," *power* is put to the proof. Along with this goes the idea that, if God's presence "fills our earth," each of us can work "only as God wills" — we are "God's puppets." This is predestination with a vengeance.

b. This same hymn comes again into her mind as she lies down at night, and the lines of it are running in her thoughts as she goes to sleep:[1]

> "All service ranks the same with God —
> With God, whose puppets, best and worst,
> Are we: there is no last nor first."

So her New Year's day is begun and ended with the thought of our relation to the great Father.

c. In Scene I, *Morning*, the song which smites the sinful Sebald is "The year's at the spring":[2]

> "The year's at the spring
> And day's at the morn;
> Morning's at seven;
> The hill-side's dew-pearled;
> The lark's on the wing;
> The snail's on the thorn:
> God's in his heaven —
> All's right with the world!"

d. In Scene II, *Noon*, Pippa's song[3] is the one referring to Queen Caterina Cornaro ("Kate the Queen"). She was a Venetian lady, born in 1454 and married in 1472 to James of Lusignan, King of Cyprus. Upon his death in 1473 she succeeded to the throne, but in 1489 abdicated in favor of the Republic of Venice, which formally annexed the island. She returned to Venice, and the government conferred upon her for life the castle whose ruins now stand on the hill above Asolo. Here she lived in affluence, surrounded by her servants and a brilliant court. She died

[1] P. 195, ll. 16–18.

[2] P. 180, between ll. 3 and 4. The song is consistently in every detail a *spring* song. No one is disturbed by the fact that it does not fit north Italy on Jan. 1. Its freshness and cheer make it very appropriate for New Year's day. It is a familiar song to Pippa, and now runs in her head.

[3] P. 185, ll. 61–78.

in Venice in 1510. She was exceedingly kind to the people of Asolo, and they in turn loved her. It is altogether natural, therefore, that there should be, supposedly, a familiar song in Asolo in which the Queen's name comes in as the people perhaps liked to have it, and that Pippa should be singing the song on her holiday. This song, however, has little reference to Queen Caterina, except bringing her in in a sort of refrain. But the point of the song hits exactly the circumstances in which Jules and Phene are when they hear it:

"Give her but a least excuse to love me!"

And the name of "Kate the Queen" has a power over Jules who knows her history and incidents which have been, in popular tradition, connected with her life here.[1]

e. In Scene III, *Evening*, Pippa's song[2] about a king who lived long ago,

"In the morning of the world,"

so different from the king who oppresses the people of north Italy now, steels Liugi's heart in his purpose to kill the king that now is.

f. In Scene IV, *Night*, Pippa's song[3] which saves herself from the plot which the Intendant is unfolding to the Monsignor is an exquisite appreciation of Nature, beginning

"Overhead the tree-tops meet."

It is full of the joy of innocence, and ends with God's suddenly putting forth His hand into a human life.

[1] See Jules' words p. 185, l. 79–p. 186, l. 7.

[2] P. 189, l. 52–p. 190, l. 28. This song was first published, signed "Z," in *The Monthly Repository*, vol. IX, N. S., pp. 707, 708, in 1835. It was revised and a few lines were added before it was included in *Pippa Passes*.

[3] P. 193, ll. 98–113.

IV. The Scenes more in Detail

We are ready now to study more in detail the different divisions of the poem.

1. The *Introduction*, which is Pippa's meditation or soliloquy before she goes out, begins with a gorgeous sunrise. In a description starting with a line of one word, "Day," the sun comes up with a flood of gold which overflows in a long rippling line at the end of the first paragraph:[1]

"Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world."

Notice the gradual up-flooding of the light:

"Day!
Faster and more fast,
O'er night's brim, day boils at last:
Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim
Where spurting and suppressed it lay,
For not a froth-flake touched the rim
Of yonder gap in the solid gray
Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;[2]
But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,
Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,
Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world."[3]

Pippa, who has to toil the rest of the days,[4] is bound to make the most of this day of liberty:

"Oh, Day, if I squander a wavelet of thee,
Then shame fall on Asolo, mischief on me!"[5]

[1] P. 174, l. 12. [2] *i.e.* an hour ago.

[3] Some time ago a young man told me he had noticed a sunrise which behaved in exactly this way, *i.e.* the gold boiled up as here described.

[4] That this is Pippa's only holiday is plain from half a dozen places in the *Introduction*, and from Ottima's words p. 180, ll. 5–7.

[5] P. 174, ll. 13, 20; cf. the intervening lines.

"Thy long blue solemn hours serenely flowing,
Whence earth, we feel, gets steady help and good —
Thy fitful sunshine-minutes, coming, going,
As if earth turned from work in gamesome mood —
All shall be mine!" [1]

She thinks of those who seem to her the most happy in Asolo.[2] There is Ottima, the wife of Luca Gaddi who owns the silk mills.[3] To be sure, Luca is old, but Ottima has a paramour, the German Sebald, who pays her homage. Then there are Jules and Phene, who, Pippa hears, are to be married to-day. Then there are Luigi and his mother, whom she has seen going into the turret of the ruined castle so often at evening and talking so earnestly together; she thinks they must be very fond of each other. And there is the Monsignor expected from Rome to-day to see about the affairs of his brother who has recently died and to say masses for his brother's soul. Pippa is to-day free to let her fancy run riot: as the day goes on she will imagine she is Ottima, Phene, Luigi, the Monsignor, and try to get as much out of the day in her way, aided by her imagination, as they themselves can get.

Thus, in the opening part of the poem, the persons who are to be the actors in the scenes of the day are introduced to us — skilfully and naturally.[4]

[1] P. 174, ll. 21–25.

[2] Naturally enough, Pippa goes twice over the list of "Asolo's Four Happiest Ones," the second time being after she had decided to let her fancy run and put herself in the place of each of them to-day. Notice how differently they are handled the second time. Following are the parallel passages:

a. Ottima and Sebald — (1) p. 175, ll. 15–20; (2) p. 176, ll. 3–15.
b. Jules and Phene — (1) p. 175, ll. 21–26; (2) p. 176, ll. 16–45.
c. Luigi and his mother — (1) p. 175, ll. 27–33; (2) p. 176, ll. 46–67.
d. The Monsignor — (1) p. 175, ll. 33–40; (2) p. 176, ll. 68–75.

[3] Cf. also p. 180, ll. 8, 9; p. 187, ll. 21, 22.

[4] Of the actors who take part in the *scenes*, the only one who is not men-

2. *The main Scenes.*

a. Scene I, *Morning*, shows us a shrub-house in the gardens of Luca Gaddi's mansion on the hill-side. Sebald, the German, and Ottima, Luca's wife, have murdered Luca the night before:

> "Luca Gaddi's murdered corpse
> Within there, at his couch-foot, covered close —
> You cannot rid your eyes of it." [1]

They could not feel like spending the night in the house after the murder, and have spent it in this shrub-house. Ottima suggests:

> "There's one thing must be done; you know what thing.
> Come in and help to carry. We may sleep
> Anywhere in the whole wide house to-night." [2]

But Sebald answers:

> "Let him lie there until
> The angels take him! He is turned by this
> Off from his face beside, as you will see," [3]

referring to the superstitious idea that murdered persons will turn over with faces toward Heaven — in mute appeal for vengeance.

Sebald's conscience is awake,[4] and he begins to turn from

tioned in the *Introduction* is the Intendant. The reason for this is plain: Pippa knows nothing of his relation to the affairs of the Monsignor's brother — she has no idea that he will talk with the Monsignor to-night. It is, therefore, impossible that the Intendant should be mentioned in the *Introduction*. He is naturally introduced in the second interlude (p. 186, ll. 57–59) and in the third (p. 191, ll. 26–29), — just enough to prepare us for his appearing in Scene IV.

The actors in the *interludes* are not mentioned in the *Introduction*, — because the interludes are themselves of an introductory nature.

[1] P. 178, ll. 43, 44, 48. Cf. the whole passage, ll. 36–52.

[2] P. 178, ll. 54–56.

[3] P. 178, ll. 58–60.

[4] As is plain already from his tone in the conversation p. 177, ll. 37–63, although he affects to be reckless and hardened.

Ottima [1] for whose sake he has done this murder. He would recoil from her, but she wraps him about again in the old mesh of blind infatuation by recalling to his memory the earlier crises of their sinful love.[2] This she does with tremendous intensity and subtlety. And Sebald is lost, — absorbed again in a blind passion for her which makes him forget the enormity of adultery and murder.[3] She sets him to knot up her hair, which has fallen down, and commands him:

> "Bind it thrice about my brow;
> Crown me your queen, your spirit's arbitress,
> Magnificent in sin. Say that!" [4]

All but lost; for just as he binds the hair about Ottima's brow, repeating

> "I crown you
> My great white queen, my spirit's arbitress,
> Magnificent . . ." [5]

Pippa passes, singing

> "The year's at the spring
> And day's at the morn;
> Morning's at seven;
> The hill-side's dew-pearled;
> The lark's on the wing;
> The snail's on the thorn:
> God's in his heaven —
> All's right with the world!"

The words are like a dagger to Sebald's soul. He exclaims in confusion:

> "God's in his heaven! Do you hear that? Who spoke?
> You, you spoke!" [6]

[1] See the conversation p. 178, l. 32–p. 179, l. 14.
[2] P. 179, ll. 24–73.
[3] P. 179, ll. 62–65, 69, 70, 74–76.
[4] P. 179, l. 76–p. 180, l. 2.
[5] P. 180, ll. 2–4.
[6] P. 180, ll. 4, 5.

He is disillusioned by Pippa's words. The charm of Ottima is gone; he sees just what she is.[1] He sees just what he has done:

> "That little peasant's voice
> Has righted all again. Though I be lost,
> I know which is the better, never fear,
> Of vice or virtue, purity or lust,
> Nature or trick! I see what I have done,
> Entirely now! Oh I am glad to feel
> Such torments — let the world take credit thence —
> I, having done my deed, pay too its price!
> I hate, hate — curse you! God's in his heaven!"[2]

And seeing "entirely now," he draws his dagger and kills himself.[3] His last words are:

> "My brain is drowned now — quite drowned: all I feel
> Is . . . is, at swift-recurring intervals,
> A hurry-down within me, as of waters
> Loosened to smother up some ghastly pit:
> There they go — whirls from a black fiery sea!"[4]

b. At the beginning of Scene II, *Noon*, the situation is peculiar, but is explained in the preceding interlude. Certain foreign art-students of Venice are jealous of one who has been of their number,[5] a young French sculptor, Jules,

[1] P. 180, ll. 11–36.

[2] P. 180, ll. 36–44.

[3] It is plain in ll. 41–43 that he is about to stab himself. It is plain also that Ottima (p. 180, ll. 44–51) is trying to prevent him from stabbing himself, or to delay him. But a stage-direction [*Stabs himself*], put in at the proper moment, would have been of assistance to the reader.

[4] P. 180, ll. 52–56.

[5] Browning's words in the stage-direction (p. 180, between ll. 57 and 58), "*opposite the house of* JULES, *a young French statuary, at Possagno*," mean that Jules is a maker of statues and is working at Possagno, a short distance from Asolo. Possagno is the birthplace of Canova, the great sculptor, (born 1757, died 1822), and his tomb is there. His house there is used as a museum and contains models and casts of his works. It is among these that

— jealous perhaps because of his superior ability. Anyway, they charge him with being conceited and supercilious. Under their ringleader, Lutwyche, they have gotten up what they think is a good joke on Jules. They have written him letters purporting to be from a young lady of high position who has admired a piece of his work [1] exhibited at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice. They have kept up the deception, using the name and describing the appearance of a Greek girl named Phene, an artists' model furnished them by a woman named Natalia. On the strength of the correspondence, Jules has fallen in love with the young lady, and has proposed marriage. They have put Phene forward to marry him, and the upshot of it all has come to be the wedding this New Year's noon. The last and most adroit piece of trickery has been their getting Jules to consent, on plausible grounds, to a stipulation that he shall not speak to the lady until after they are married. Phene has been taught what she is to say to Jules as soon as they get back from the wedding.[2] This speech,[3] which Natalia has compelled her to learn and has told her she must say,[4] is in ridicule of Jules' love and gives the whole

Jules is studying (see p. 181, ll. 67–73, 102–126). It is plain from the students' talk that Jules has been with them in Venice (*e.g.* p. 181, ll. 36–44). It is evident also that he has lived some time in Asolo, for Pippa knows where his house stands and knows of his marriage to-day.

[1] The work specified (p. 182, ll. 19–21) is a statue of Tydeus, one of the heroes who, according to Greek legend, lost their lives in the expedition of the "Seven against Thebes." Æschylus used the legend for the materials of a tragedy which was first played in 467 B.C., at Athens.

[2] The wedding, according to Roman Catholic custom, would naturally be in church. Pippa (*Introduction*, p. 176, ll. 19, 20) understands it is to be in the church at Possagno (cf. note 5 on the preceding page).

[3] P. 184, l. 71–p. 185, l. 45.

[4] P. 184, ll. 11–13, 38–40. The other details above are all from the interlude.

trick away, and even contains at the end the name of Lutwyche, his chief tormentor. This group of students have come up from Venice and are now gathered outside Jules' house to see the explosion and to enjoy his chagrin and humiliation.

As the scene opens, Jules and Phene enter the house, returning from the wedding. Jules in all sincerity pours out his expressions of love upon her and wonders why she does not speak. At last she answers, slowly and with difficulty, for it has become a serious affair with her; she really loves Jules. And finally, explaining how she came by it, she gives this speech which they have made her learn by heart. The situation is really tragic. Shall Jules throw Phene over? Shall he kill Lutwyche and have revenge? Just at that moment, Pippa passes singing

> "Give her but a least excuse to love me!"
> "Is she wronged? — To the rescue of her honour,
> My heart!"

with a refrain bringing to memory the good Queen Caterina Cornaro. It is enough. Jules looks at Phene whose true love for him [1] has redeemed her from her past life:

> "Look at the woman here with the new soul.
> This new soul is mine!" [2]

And he will not take revenge on the students, but will take Phene, his own true wife, and they will go away together to

> "Some unsuspected isle in the far seas," [3]

and "begin Art afresh." [4]

[1] Shown very simply and beautifully in her words (p. 184, ll. 6–70) as she dreads to begin the speech she has been compelled to learn.

[2] P. 186, ll. 16, 28.

[3] P. 186, ll. 48 and 54; cf. l. 55; see also ll. 43, 44.

[4] P. 186, ll. 45, 46. Cf. p. 192, ll. 9–44.

c. In Scene III, *Evening*, we find Luigi and his mother talking together in the Turret[1] on the hill above the town. Luigi is filled with a great purpose to kill the Austrian tyrant who oppresses the Italians. He is for Italy and freedom. His mother pleads with him not to do the desperate thing. She urges the foolishness of the plan. That does not move him. She urges the danger to himself. He does not care for himself. He is going this very evening.[2] He does not expect to escape:

"The dying is best part of it."[3]

He has sweet memories of the joy of life[4] and the beauty of God's world. As these memories come thronging upon him, he names with zest so many beautiful things,[5] ending with

"May's warm slow yellow moonlit summer nights —
Gone are they, but I have them in my soul!"

But such memories do not shake his purpose. Nothing his mother can suggest as to the impossibility of his reaching the Emperor is of any avail. The references to her love for her son and his love for her seem to be lost on him. She seems unable even to pursuade him to delay his going until morning. But when she speaks of Chiara, evidently

[1] "The castle, a quadrangular building with a high tower, is an interesting monument of the thirteenth century." — Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopædia*, ed. 1912, p. 50, in art. *Asolo*. By "the Turret" Browning evidently means this tower, not the whole castle.

[2] P. 188, ll. 24, 25; cf. p. 189, ll. 33, 34.

[3] P. 188, l. 34; see ll. 33–36 and ll. 13–24.

[4] P. 188, ll. 37–41.

[5] P. 188, ll. 42–52. See the same appreciation of the beauty of the world shown on p. 189, ll. 26–28, 42–44.

his sweetheart,[1] and of what she will be doing next June, he answers:

"True, mother. Well for those who live through June!"[2]

(but he doesn't expect to live). And presently he adds:

"Yes, Chiara will be here."[3]

And when his mother insists that it was he himself who appointed next June for Chiara's coming, and he thinks of what they planned to do together in June,[4] his great self-sacrificing purpose begins to fade. But, at that moment, Pippa passes singing of an ideal king who lived long ago,

"In the morning of the world."

And the realization of the contrast between the king described in that song and the king whose foot is on his country's neck nerves Luigi to the dread duty:

"'Tis God's voice calls: how could I stay? Farewell!"[5]

[1] The mother's remark about Chiara (p. 189, ll. 48, 49), that

"She must be grown — with her blue eyes upturned
As if life were one long and sweet surprise,"

does not argue against her being Luigi's sweetheart. The fact is, of course, that young people fall in love much younger in Italy, and marry much younger, than in northern countries. Luigi himself is only fifteen (p. 188, l. 35). He hasn't seen Chiara for some time, and it must be she has grown and changed. The way his mother focuses his mind on Chiara (p. 189, ll. 39, 40, 45, 46, 48–50) and the way this affects him — here is proof enough as to what Chiara was to him.

[2] P. 189, l. 41.

[3] P. 189, l. 45.

[4] The thing specified (p. 189, ll. 50, 51) is:

"We were to see together
The Titian at Treviso,"

i.e. to see Titian's painting of the Annunciation which is in the cathedral at Treviso, capital of the province in which Asolo is situated.

[5] P. 190, l. 35.

Whatever you may think of killing a tyrannical ruler, you appreciate Luigi's devotion and self-sacrifice in undertaking what he thought was his duty for the sake of his country.

d. In Scene IV, *Night*, we see the Monsignor[1] dismissing his attendants, but requiring the Superintendent[2] of his brother's property to stay for private conference.[3] From this conversation we learn that the Monsignor is the youngest and sole survivor of three brothers,[4] — of a family guilty, for generations, of outrageous wickedness.[5] The eldest brother died fourteen years ago, and the second has recently died.[6] Since the death of the eldest brother, this Intendant[7] has had charge of his estate.[8] In the conversation, it turns out that Pippa is really the child of the Monsignor's elder brother.[9] The child would have inherited her father's estates, but the second brother engaged

[1] *Monsignor* is an honorary title conferred by the Pope, giving its bearer special dignity, and special privileges at the papal court. Those given the title are usually high ecclesiastics. In the present instance, the Monsignor, apart from the title, is a bishop (see *e.g.* p. 192, ll. 95, 96; p. 193, ll. 58, 59; cf. stage direction, p. 190, between ll. 35 and 36).

[2] The word *Intendant* which Browning uses means practically the same as the more familiar word *Superintendent*.

[3] P. 191, stage direction at beginning of Sc. IV; but especially ll. 67–71.

[4] P. 192, ll. 88–91.

[5] P. 192, ll. 82–88. This one brother who has taken orders in the Church has tried to escape becoming like the other members of the family (ll. 91–97). He has a conscience about what the rest of them have done (ll. 97–101, 121–125).

[6] P. 191, ll. 85–90; p. 193, l. 22.

[7] Whose name is really Maffeo (p. 192, ll. 70–72) *alias* Stefani (p. 191, ll. 71–74).

[8] P. 191, ll. 75–77, ll. 85–90; and woven into most of the conversation that follows.

[9] P. 193, ll. 16–22, 71–76, 87–89. Pippa did not know anything about her parents, and in her room that very morning was wondering what they were like (p. 176, ll. 66 67).

this Intendant to murder her.[1] She has not been murdered, but he has let her live in order that he might extort what he wanted from the family.[2] He now confesses that she is alive, but he will make away with her, if the Monsignor will allow him to escape;[3] for the Monsignor is for bringing him to justice. The Intendant explains that he has a plot better than killing Pippa: *i.e.* she will be brought into Bluphocks' hands, seduced and carried to Rome, and be as good as dead.[4] He asks the Monsignor to assent to the plot, — hardly even to assent, simply to tolerate it. The Monsignor has an eye on his brother's property,[5] which would by right come to Pippa. He is tempted, wavers,[6] — and her fate is in the balance. Just then she herself passes, singing

"Overhead the tree-tops meet," —

an exquisite song of childhood's simplicity, ending abruptly with the words

"Suddenly God took me."

It is enough. The Monsignor calls to his attendants:

> "My people — one and all — all — within there! Gag this villain — tie him hand and foot! He dares . . . I know not half he dares — but remove him — quick! *Miserere mei, Domine!* Quick, I say!"[7]

[1] P. 193, ll. 16–22, 40, 41. Pippa was an infant at the time, and that was about fourteen years ago. She is, therefore, fourteen or fifteen now.

[2] *i.e.* they suppose Pippa dead; but when the Intendant gets in a tight place, he can produce her and make them come to terms, he thinks. Notice what he says, p. 193, ll. 89–92.

[3] P. 193, ll. 42 sqq., especially ll. 47–49, 71–76, 83–87.

[4] P. 193, ll. 69 sqq., especially ll. 76–83, 92–97. Pippa will not last more than three years at the life into which she will be brought in Rome (ll. 77, 78).

[5] But it is plain from p. 192, ll. 97–101, and p. 193, ll. 14–33, that the Monsignor wants the property, not for himself, but for the Church.

[6] The Intendant notices this in the Monsignor's face already as early as p. 193, ll. 83 and 84.

[7] P. 193, l. 114–p. 194, l. 4. Every phrase in the speech is significant.

3. In the *Epilogue*, we see Pippa again in her room, tired from her day, somewhat dissatisfied, and wondering how near she might ever come to touching those great people she has been thinking of so much since morning, — as, for instance, perhaps the silk she winds to-morrow may be used to

> "bind
> And border Ottima's cloak's hem." [1]

And Pippa never knows that she has entered into their souls' destinies this day. As she lies down, the morning's hymn is running in her head:

> "God bless me! I can pray no more to-night.
> No doubt, some way or other, hymns say right.
> *All service ranks the same with God —*
> *With God, whose puppets, best and worst,*
> *Are we: there is no last nor first.*" [2]

And she falls asleep.[3]

The Monsignor's agitation and his eagerness to have the Intendant gagged and removed show how sorely he has been tempted. The words "*Miserere mei, Domine*," (Ps. 51 : 1, — in the Vulgate Ps. 50 : 1) — "Have mercy upon me, O Lord" — show the Monsignor's sense of guilt, his realization of how near he came to consenting to the plot. Pippa came by barely in time.

[1] P. 195, ll. 2–10. The words quoted are from ll. 9 and 10.

[2] P. 195, ll. 14–18.

[3] The more closely one reads *Pippa Passes* the more remarkable will its construction appear. Notice how the strands which were started in the Introduction and woven in through the Scenes have their ends all caught up in the Epilogue (especially that part of it p. 194, ll. 45 sqq.). So also with strands started later: Jules' plans (end of Sc. II, p. 186, ll. 42 sqq., especially ll. 45, 46) caught up in the Monsignor's conversation (Sc. IV, p. 192, ll. 9–44); end of Interlude III and end of Sc. IV caught up in the Epilogue (p. 194, ll. 11–44). There is much of such interlacing. There are no loose ends left.

V. Conclusion

There is no need that I should speak of the profound truth which lies in these simple scenes. Pippa, the humble toiler in the silk mills, by her good cheer and wholesomeness and faith, was the decisive factor in destinies of which she was altogether ignorant.[1] So also no one of us can tell how far the influence of his life unconsciously reaches, but it is further than we think. To live cheerfully, nobly, courageously, not only for our own sake but for the sake of others, — this is the splendid privilege of every man and woman.[2]

[1] As to the reasonableness of Pippa's passing near so much that is tragic and bloody without knowing it, it need simply be answered that any of us, even in a small city, frequently pass within a few feet of plot, murder, and other tragic situations, and know nothing about their being there.

Those who do not understand how it happens that Pippa passes on the edge of each scene have failed to observe the fact that Browning, in the Introduction, has provided for just that. He has given Pippa's plan for the day, and she will, at different hours, naturally haunt the vicinity where the people are likely to be in whose place she is to imagine herself at that time. The surroundings will help her imagination. Of course, having her song come in each time at the critical moment is a matter that can be adjusted in Literature, not in real life.

[2] It seems hardly necessary to add, what so many discussions of *Pippa Passes* put in a prominent place, that Pippa is not actually a girl who sang in Asolo on a New Year's day, and that the events described in these scenes are not historical facts. It never occurred to me that any reader of the poem would suppose we have anything here but the product of Browning's imagination mortised into a historical situation, until I noticed what pains are taken by others to protest that the poem is not history.

XII

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Pp. 287–305

THIS drama was published in 1843. It was No. 5 in that series of pamphlets known as *Bells and Pomegranates*. Browning was 31 years old when it was published.

I. THE TITLE

1. The word 'scutcheon (written also without the apostrophe) is the same as escutcheon,[1] and the two forms have, for a long time, held their places side by side in the language. As used in heraldry, an escutcheon is the surface, on a shield or elsewhere, on which are blazoned or depicted a definite part of the armorial bearings of a person, family, or city. The space within the outline of the escutcheon is called the *field*, and is occupied by the designs and colors which distinguish the bearer, — except the crest, motto, supporters, and some other details, which are outside the escutcheon. Anyone recalling pictures representing the arms of various persons or families will recognize the area to which the word escutcheon technically refers. The word is more generally used in a little broader sense, — as when we say a family displays its 'scutcheon

[1] But some dictionaries differentiate the uses of the two forms, giving the more general meaning to 'scutcheon, (*e.g.* see *escutcheon* and *scutcheon* in the *Century Dict.*) The dropping of the *e* has, of course, come about for reasons of ease and readiness of speaking.

on the stationery and on the carriage-doors; the word under such circumstances means practically the coat of arms by which the family is distinguished.

2. *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, then, is a phrase meaning a dishonor to the family, — a smirch on its good name. The 'scutcheon is symbolic of the family's pride and reputation, and the deed which disgraces the family is as if one had defaced with mud or soot the arms blazoned on its shield.

II. The Nature of this Drama

1. *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* is a tragedy in three acts.

2. It is a pitiful bloody thing, in which the casual reader is sometimes seized with the feeling that the tragic outcome is unnecessary. I can understand the fact that the casual reader is struck this way, but that a thorough Browning student like Dr. Stopford Brooke should feel that way about it[1] I cannot understand. The sufficient answer both to Dr. Stopford Brooke and to the casual reader is that unfortunately things do frequently turn out in this pitiful tragic way *in real life*, when a little change at the critical moment would have changed the whole outcome. And the real dramatist's business is to deal with situations as they really may come to pass in human life. So Shakespeare has brought *Othello* to a pitiful tragic outcome, when the slightest change at the critical moment would have made it all otherwise.[2] The simple fact is that in real life terrible consequences come, where a very slight change

[1] Stopford A. Brooke, *The Poetry of Robert Browning*, New York, 1902, pp. 231–235.

[2] Many may be like one of my students who would have had *Othello* come out all right. Shakespeare could not bring *Othello* to a happy termination without destroying it. If he had tried to bring it out so, there would have been no such play.

would have made it all different, if we had only known — *if we had only known.*

3. The subject of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* is *Honor.* And the story is of the sin which disgraced the name of the Tresham family and of the greater wrong that was done when the brother tried to wipe out the disgrace with blood. It is an eloquent warning against our judging too hastily and taking vengeance into our own hands. I pointed out to you that Browning's comprehensive mind must grapple with every situation sooner or later, and here he has dealt with Honor not retrieved by vengeance but by the suffering of the soul.

III. The Period and Place

1. The period is the eighteenth century, as is indicated by Browning's "Time, 17—" at the top.

2. The place is in England. You are dealing with English trees, English scenery, and old proud English families, together with abundant references to events in English history with which these families are connected.

IV. The Persons

The Persons are:

1. Thorold, Earl Tresham, *i.e.* Thorold Tresham, the Earl, — usually called Lord Tresham — head now of the family — a man mature, strong, dignified, very proud of the noble history of the family and its unspotted honor, eager to pass all this without spot or blemish on to his successors.

2. His sister, Mildred Tresham, a girl only fourteen years old,[1] bereft of father and mother, now under her brother's guardianship, — keen, beautiful, willful but not

[1] P. 290, l. 47.

perverse — indeed anticipating her brother's wishes concerning her and eager to do them. It is very evident how strong is the love and admiration between Lord Tresham and his sister.

3. Henry, Earl Mertoun, *i.e.* Henry Mertoun, the Earl, — usually spoken of in the play simply as the Earl, — young (constantly his being so young is referred to), of a family no less noble and no less honorable than the Treshams. He is formal suitor for the hand of Mildred Tresham.

4. Austin Tresham, a soldier, Lord Tresham's younger brother, — at home just now.

5. Guendolen Tresham, a member of another branch of the family, — cousin to these Treshams, — engaged to Austin. Such marriage of cousins is not good, but still frequently takes place. It is not said whether they are first cousins or further removed. When Lord Tresham introduces them to Mertoun, he says:

> "My only brother, Austin: he's the king's.
> Our cousin, Lady Guendolen — betrothed
> To Austin." [1]

6. Gerard, the warrener, one of the oldest retainers of Lord Tresham's family, — a loyal simple man of high ideals, and as sensitive on the family's honor as Lord Tresham himself.

7. Other retainers in conversation.

V. The Centre of the Story

The centre of the story is one of those things which occur too often even in the highest circles and bring to all related to the matter an endless chain of regret. These

[1] P. 289, ll. 8–10. The words "he's the king's" mean, of course, he's in the king's service, in the army.

two young people, Mildred Tresham and Henry Mertoun, have met in the woods, have become acquainted, have loved each other, — until one day the hour came when they were swept off their feet by a flood of passion — unable to think calmly, blind to all consequences, so young, so uninstructed in self-mastery, they have lost hold of themselves and have sinned before they hardly realized what they were doing. This bears no relation to vice, and is especially the danger which besets the innocent and those who love most. It is the rising of the mighty tide of passion which overwhelms all reason for the time. Against it no one is secure except in complete self-mastery. But of self-mastery these two young people had not yet enough, and neither pride nor fear could stand before the most elemental passion of human nature.

Since that time, Mertoun has climbed by means of a yew-tree each night to Mildred's chamber, and then has come down the tree again. This is *not* for a repetition of what they have done. After that one outbreak of passion, they have mastered themselves. Their conversation given and the soliloquy of each one refer constantly and consistently to one act and only one, the memory of which burns in their thoughts.

The main point in any explanation of Mildred Tresham's conduct must be that she loved Henry Mertoun. But other elements are to be reckoned too. Twice in almost the same words [1] they come out in her pitiful self-accusing:

> "I was so young, I loved him so, I had
> No mother, God forgot me, and I fell."

Mertoun blames himself bitterly, spares himself no reproaches as to how much he has wronged Mildred, and will do anything possible to make reparation.

[1] P. 294, ll. 41, 42; p. 299, ll. 42–44. Cf. p. 300, ll. 4–9.

There is the centre of the story, — the sin, with

"The love, the shame, and the despair." [1]

And Mertoun has resolved on the right move, the honorable move. He will go to Lord Tresham and ask for Mildred's hand and make her his wife.[2]

VI. The Construction of the Tragedy around this Central Fact

Browning is not a great dramatist; his power is in using the monologue. But although his dramatic works are in some points technically defective, he frequently handles his materials with an original skill which is admirable. I cannot help seeing that, around the central fact of which we have just spoken, he has built up this drama with curious skill.

1. Act I, Scene 1, shows us the interior of a lodge, perhaps the porter's lodge, on Lord Tresham's estate. The servants are crowding the windows to see Earl Mertoun and his train. For this is the day he comes to ask for Lady Mildred's hand. The conversation of the servants is exceedingly well done, — the kind of thing they would be talking. The flavor of their conversation, the gibes at one another, the comparing Mertoun's followers with those of their own number who go with Lord Tresham to meet him, the comments on Mertoun's young appearance, the swallowing down of a lot of drinkables which Tresham's butler has given them in view of the festive occasion, the

[1] P. 293, l. 30; cf. p. 304, ll. 59, 60: Mildred's words in each case.

[2] Every reader of this drama will distinctly observe that these are young people of high mind and high ideals. Everything shows that. It is very evident that Mertoun's visits to Mildred's room are to encourage and reassure her, because she feels so overwhelmed and he feels that he is so to blame.

running on into the house to see what happens next — all this is exceedingly good and true to life.

But there is one retainer, oldest of them all, trusted, a favorite with Lady Mildred and very fond of her, — and now he is glum, indifferent to the arrival of Mertoun and his cavalcade. Every effort to get Gerard interested in the matter is fruitless. When offered "a half-place" at a window, he stands back, saying: "Here is my place."[1] When rallied with the unnecessary information that Earl Mertoun is coming

"To ask our master's sister's hand,"

he answers in most non-committal style, "What then?"[2] When laughed at for this, he abruptly changes the subject to a practical question about inspecting the hawks to-morrow.[3] He refuses to drink to the occasion.[4] In the end, when they tell him that Mertoun will come back this way (so Gerard can see him then), he says, "Then my way's here," and goes to avoid seeing Mertoun.[5]

The new reader and the audience are not supposed to know what the central fact of the story is. These actions of Gerard, therefore, stimulate the curiosity. This man seems to have something on his mind. What ails him? Why is he not like the rest, full of good cheer at Mertoun's coming to ask for Mildred's hand? There must be some mystery here. The normal human being has curiosity instantly piqued at this.

2. Scene II heightens this curiosity in the reader's mind. We see the interior of the great drawing-room in Lord Tresham's house. Lord Tresham, Mertoun, Austin Tresham, and Guendolen are there.

[1] P. 287, ll. 5–8.
[2] P. 287, ll. 8–14.
[3] P. 287, ll. 15–29, especially ll. 27–29.
[4] P. 288, ll. 34–36.
[5] P. 288, ll. 37, 38.

Lord Tresham receives Mertoun very graciously and makes a very complimentary speech to him. But Mertoun is nervous and embarrassed, grows red, and halts and flounders in his answer, but finally manages to present his formal request to be considered a suitor for Mildred's hand.[1] Why this embarrassment on Mertoun's part? Is he so bashful as all that?

Tresham answers cordially, but assures him that

> "Mildred's hand is hers to give
> Or to refuse."[2]

And Mertoun very eagerly asks:

> "But you, you grant my suit?
> I have your word if hers?"[3]

and is thrown into immense confusion when Tresham asks him if he has ever seen Mildred.[4] Why is he so confused in trying to explain how he saw Mildred?

As soon as Tresham has promised to be favorable to Mertoun's suit Mertoun is anxious to go. Notice also his evident sense of relief.[5] He is so anxious to get out that he neglects to make any arrangement as to a day when Mildred will receive him and let him present his suit.[6] When he is gone, Austin and Guendolen both comment on the fact that Mertoun seemed much more eager to please Lord Tresham than to please Mildred or set on foot any move to win her.[7]

Now the reader's curiosity will not be quiet. This is

[1] P. 289, ll. 10–30. Cf. also ll. 31–36.
[2] P. 289, ll. 36–43.
[3] P. 289, ll. 43, 44.
[4] P. 289, ll. 46–56. Cf. also ll. 56–63.
[5] P. 290, ll. 2–8.
[6] P. 290, ll. 9–14. Cf. also the ll. following these.
[7] P. 290, ll. 22–39, 49–62.

all queer. Why is Mertoun so embarrassed? Why does he stumble so in his answers? Why is he so eager to please Lord Tresham? Why is he so confused when asked if he has ever seen Mildred? Why is he so relieved when Lord Tresham is favorable to his suit? Why is he so eager to get away? Why is he so careless about arranging to meet Mildred and win her favor? Surely there's a mystery here.

3. And the first half of Scene III added to all this brings the new reader's curiosity up to a still higher pitch. Guendolen has gone to Mildred's room to tell her about the interview and to get her to agree to receive Mertoun to-morrow or the day after to-morrow [1] and let him present himself to her as suitor. We see Guendolen and Mildred talking in Mildred's room.

But Mildred is quite indifferent to Guendolen's account of the pedigree of Earl Mertoun and shows no interest in Guendolen's description of his appearance. She is, however, eagerly interested in learning how her brother received him: [2]

> "my brother —
> Did he . . . you said that he received him well?"

Mildred rather curtly dismisses the jesting Guendolen, but just as Guendolen is going she laughingly throws in some more information, and finds Mildred correcting her about the color of Mertoun's hair; and the explanation which the confused Mildred makes is very lame.[3]

This, says the new reader, is extraordinary. Why is Mildred so interested in how her brother received Mertoun? Why is she not interested in how Mertoun looks? Why is she so confused when she betrays the fact that she knows the color of his hair?

[1] As she was asked to do at the end of Sc. II, p. 291, ll. 3–12.
[2] P. 291, ll. 40, 41.
[3] P. 291, l. 69–p. 292, l. 5.

Thus from the very beginning to past the middle of the third scene, there is a constant heightening of the reader's curiosity, a constant sharpening of the reader's interest. I call that good dramatic construction.

4. And having brought the interest to this pitch, the method by which the mystery is explained to the reader (or to the audience at the play) is also well chosen and well handled. As soon as she is left alone, Mildred places the lamp in a purple pane in her window, and presently a figure wearing a slouched hat and wrapped in a mantle comes in through the window. He throws off cloak and hat, and it is Earl Mertoun himself. And in the few minutes of conversation between him and Mildred, the reader understands it all, — the sin, the shame, the remorse, his hope that it will never be known now that he has her brother's consent to their marriage, her feeling that she can never live through it and play the part of not knowing Mertoun before, their agreement to have their last secret meeting to-morrow night, — and he is gone out of the window again and down the yew-tree. This is the end of Act I.

Let those who criticise Browning's dramatic skill stand up and tell how else in a single act so much interest could be stimulated in readers or audience, and the real situation be so clearly made known.

5. But what was the trouble with Gerard, the old retainer? Why was he so glum in the first scene? This needs no answer when you read Act II.[1]

It is next morning. Act II shows Lord Tresham hurrying Gerard into the library and locking the door, and commanding Gerard to repeat "firmly and circumstantially" what he has just told him. And old Gerard, torn between

[1] Act II contains but a single scene.

devotion to Mildred and duty toward Lord Tresham, unfolds the fact that he has, for a month, seen a man at midnight climb up the yew-tree night after night to Lady Mildred's window, enter and stay an hour or two.[1] Lord Tresham cannot believe his ears and demands that the thing be told in all its details. Gerard's story is perfectly straightforward. The first time he saw it, it was by accident. He was tracking a stag that had broken the fence, and just as he passed here he saw a man come out of Lady Mildred's window and down the tree; and it was a great moonlight night as "light as any day."[2] Tresham sees the sincerity of the man, knows his loyalty to the house and to Mildred, and knows that Gerard speaks the truth when he says that since he first saw this he has groaned as if in a fiery net.[3] The whole conversation is of the highest type of appropriate dialogue. Gerard, now that he has told what he has seen, wishes he had not done it.[4] He answers a few more questions and goes out, leaving Lord Tresham alone.

Lord Tresham can hardly realize that this thing can be possible, and is trying to collect his thoughts when he is interrupted by Guendolen's knocking. He asks her to come in.[5] As she enters, he hastily pulls down a book and tries to conceal his agitation. He agrees that he is not well, and sends for Mildred on the excuse that he has found the passage they were looking for in an old Italian book.[6]

[1] P. 294, l. 56–p. 295, l. 17. Gerard says that it has been "at least a month," that he has seen it "twenty times," that the man has stayed "an hour, two hours."

[2] P. 295, ll. 17–24. [3] P. 295, ll. 27–31. [4] P. 295, ll. 32–48.

[5] The door, though closed, has remained unfastened since Gerard went out.

[6] P. 296, ll. 24–31. Cf. ll. 31–35, and notice that in l. 33 Guendolen uses the phrase "some blot i' the 'scutcheon."

And presently Mildred enters. The rest of the Act is brief and painful. At first only Tresham and Mildred are there. He sees it is of no use to hedge. She tells him to speak plainly. Tresham accuses her pointblank of letting a man enter her chamber window at night. She does not deny it, although he begs her to do so. And then Tresham demands the man's name. This Mildred will not tell. And when Tresham asks what she will do about the appointment made for to-morrow for Earl Mertoun to come and present his suit, Mildred answers:

"I will receive him." [1]

At these words, Tresham in a fury calls Guendolen and Austin who are outside, declares to them in scathing terms the position in which Mildred stands — a position entirely inconceivable to his sense of honor — she guilty of this man's visits in her chamber, refusing to give his name, yet ready to forsake him and to deceive Earl Mertoun by pretending to give him her unstained womanhood. Such an accumulation of wickednesses in the sister whom he loved and admired goads this man to madness. He rushes out as Mildred faints.

Guendolen, as this Act ends, sees through the tangle to the fact, — realizes that the secret lover and Earl Mertoun are the same man, and hopes to reach Lord Tresham before he has done anything desperate.[2]

6. Such is the situation throughout the day which precedes the last Act. Stopford Brooke is opposed to such a situation, — says it is "horrible," "revolting," says he has to accept it "with wrath," says Browning ought to have made Mildred tell Tresham her lover's name, says that "a good dramatist would have arranged" it

[1] P. 298, l. 9.

[2] P. 299, l. 70–p. 300, l. 38.

"so differently."[1] It is only fair to Stopford Brooke to answer bluntly that his criticism at this point is puerile. That is an ugly word and it is used here with great reluctance. But it is impossible to avoid using it, if I am to speak honestly of this criticism of Dr. Brooke's. If Mildred had given Mertoun's name at this point, there would have been no play — nothing to make a drama out of. The whole matter would have been patched up and the two would have been married, — and no drama.[2] It is in having created precisely this situation that the greatness of Browning's dramatic skill lies. Such things *do happen in real life.* Mildred is a *Tresham,* a chip of the same block from which her brother comes. She is not going to give her lover's name at command of her brother. Moreover, she is faithful to Henry Mertoun unto death and she is not going to explain that he is her clandestine lover, until she knows how much harm it may do him. This drama is a tragedy of *honor,* and Mildred Tresham's sense of honor is no less than her proud brother's. And she is in honor bound to her lover, Henry Mertoun, and whatever the disgrace they may heap on her, she cannot expose his name to disgrace unless he wills it so.

I have seen and heard Dr. Stopford Brooke. He is a man old enough and acquainted enough with the world so that such a criticism from him is surprising and incongruous, it is so unlike him. No excuse can be made for his high-school-girl attitude toward this crisis in the *Blot in the 'Scutcheon.*

[1] Stopford A. Brooke, *The Poetry of Robert Browning,* New York, 1902, pp. 233, 234.

[2] It is like the case in *Hamlet:* the student, when asked "Why didn't Hamlet kill the king sooner?" answered right, "Why, if he had killed the king, there wouldn't have been any play."

7. Then comes the third Act — brief and pitiful in the extreme.

We see the end of the Yew-tree Avenue under Mildred's window. Lord Tresham has walked for hours trying to subdue the storm in him, but always his feet come back to this one spot. And as he approaches now, it is near midnight. As the clock strikes, he steps behind a tree.

And Mertoun comes, in his cloak and slouched hat, to make his last secret visit to Mildred; for to-morrow he asks her openly to be his wife. Up in the window of Mildred's room, the lamp is lifted to the purple pane, and Mertoun lays his hand on the yew-tree to ascend. But Tresham's hand is on his arm and brings him out of the shadow into the moonlight, and Tresham demands his name. But Mertoun, recognizing that it is Tresham, begs him not to compel him to make himself known, — for Tresham's own sake. But there is no avoiding it:

> "I read your white inexorable face.
> Know me, Lord Tresham!" [1]

And he throws off cloak and hat.

Be sure that this is the last drop of bitterness to Thorold Tresham, man of honor. All day he has tried to adjust himself to a realization that his sister could seem pure and good and be at the same time a wanton and deceiver. And now to have it suddenly appear that Mertoun too has been playing a part, that he too is without honor and without shame —! Tresham cannot think. He cannot see how it all is and how he may be misinterpreting the motives of both. He will not let Mertoun tell him, although the boy begs him to let him speak for Mildred's sake. Tresham demands that Mertoun fight. And reluctantly,

[1] P. 301, ll. 40, 41.

knowing he must not kill Mildred's brother, Mertoun draws. He makes a few passes, and falls mortally wounded. Tresham knows the young man did not defend himself:

> "You made no effort to resist me." [1]

And a few minutes later he explains:

> "There was no fight at all.
> He let me slaughter him." [2]

The sudden revulsion of feeling, when Mertoun is down in his blood, is very natural in one so high-strung as Lord Tresham. He is willing now to listen, as the dying boy explains to him how it all came, — the love, the sin, the hope to make it right by marriage — to keep it unknown — to leave no blot on the proud 'scutcheon of the Tresham family. And Tresham sees it all.

Mertoun's last thoughts are of Mildred:

> "Ah, Mildred! What will Mildred do?
> Tresham, her life is bound up in the life
> That's bleeding fast away." [3]

And leaving messages for her, he says:

> "Say, loving her
> Lowers me down the bloody slope to death
> With memories." [4]

And as they start to lift the dying boy, the moving his body turns his face away from Mildred's window, but he turns his face back that way, and dies with his eyes upon the lamp in the purple window-pane.[5]

[1] P. 301, l. 69. [2] P. 303, ll. 14, 15. [3] P. 302, ll. 41–43.

[4] P. 302, ll. 56–58. The figure is this: the memories are like ropes or straps by which Mertoun is lowered "down the bloody slope to death," *i.e.* he does not go down quickly and violently, but his love for Mildred, holding on to him by these memories, lowers him gently down to death.

[5] P. 301, stage direction after l. 11; p. 302, stage direction in l. 41; p. 303, ll. 2–4, with the included stage direction.

8. The last scene of this third Act shows us the interior of Mildred's room. And Lord Tresham comes to tell her what has come to pass. He would not let anyone come but himself;[1] for the last messages were given to him to bring, not to any of the others who had come there under the yews when he called. And now he comes. But Mildred sees what has happened, — sees it by his face and his empty scabbard.[2] (He has dropped his sword.) She will not let him tell her how he killed Henry Mertoun,[3] whose blood was "on fire with youth and hope and love" of her.[4] And this proud Lord Tresham confesses:

> "I
> This morning took an office not my own,"[5]

confesses how, as the boy lay bleeding to death there a few minutes ago, with "the moon on his flushed cheek," the whole matter was clear:

> "I gathered all
> The story ere he told it: I saw through
> The troubled surface of his crime and yours
> A depth of purity immovable."[6]

And Mildred forgives her brother all and blesses him from her "soul of souls,"[7] and dies of anguish of spirit, with her arms about her brother's neck.[8] And Tresham has drank down a poison just as he came to Mildred's room,[9]

[1] P. 303, ll. 6–10.

[2] P. 304, ll. 3–6, 26–28 (especially the stage direction).

[3] P. 304, ll. 32–37.

[4] P. 304, ll. 52, 53.

[5] P. 304, ll. 17, 18. By the "office not my own," he means the office of judge and avenger. See p. 305, l. 53.

[6] P. 304, ll. 67–71.

[7] P. 304, ll. 23–31; p. 305, ll. 5–17.

[8] P. 305. ll. 10 (stage direction), 22–24, 29, 30.

[9] P. 305, ll. 32–36, especially l. 34. Cf. p. 304, ll. 14, 39, 40; p. 305, ll. 3, 24–29, 41.

commends the estate and title and honor to Austin and Guendolen [1] who have come in, — the 'scutcheon —

> "You hold our 'scutcheon up —
> Austin, no blot on it!" [2]

and dies with the words

> "Vengeance is God's, not man's. Remember me!" [3]

VII. Conclusion

Such is the *Blot in the 'Scutcheon*. It seems to me that Browning has developed the story with a high degree of reasonableness, and has shown genuine skill in leading up to a tragic crisis and in handling the situation when the crisis has come.

If it be urged that too many die at the end of this play, it should be answered that Shakespeare, the prince of dramatists, has more die at the end of *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and many another tragedy. If it be argued that Mildred's dying from grief and anguish is too extreme, it need simply be answered that such cases are common in real life, — that physicians are frequently afraid women will die of sudden grief and that we have known of their doing it. If you object to Tresham's suicide, it need only be added that many a noble-souled man has committed suicide under circumstances less extreme than these. Tresham's suicide *by poison* does not seem artistic, — neither does Luria's death by similar means. The method does not compare well with Othello's use of his dagger. Why does Browning bring Tresham and Luria to their end by so inglorious a thing as poison? Because Browning is bound to be true to life. And the fact is that so many men, when things get

[1] P. 305, ll. 43–46. [2] P. 305, ll. 46, 47. [3] P. 305, l. 53.

too thick, do find their release by taking poison. And so Browning puts it that way here.

Indeed, the humanness of the *Blot in the 'Scutcheon* is one of its outstanding characteristics. It is so probable that it grips us. And the feeling in it is sharp — too sharp, some may think. It is so sharp that it hurts. But the fact that it does stab so shows how well Browning has succeeded in tragic writing.

XIII

LURIA

Pp. 379–401

No. 8, the last of that series of pamphlets entitled *Bells and Pomegranates*, was published in 1846, when Browning was 34 years old. It contained two dramatic pieces — *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy*. We study *Luria* this morning, *A Soul's Tragedy* Saturday morning.

Luria, then, for our study this morning.

I. The Dedication

It is dedicated to Walter Savage Landor (born 1775, died 1864). The words

> "I dedicate this last attempt for the present at dramatic poetry"[1]

indicate that *Luria* was written subsequent to *A Soul's Tragedy*. *Luria* stood first, however, in the pamphlet in which the two were published, and stands before the other drama in Browning's collected works.

II. The Nature of the Piece

1. *Luria* is a tragedy in five acts, but each act contains only a single scene.

2. The action occupies only one day. It is morning in Act I, noon in Act II, afternoon in Act III, evening in Act IV, and night in Act V.

[1] P. 379, first line of the dedication.

3. The action all occurs in one place, viz. in Luria's camp between Florence and Pisa, — and, indeed, as far as any indication goes, all of it in the same tent in that camp.

4. Surely those who are anxious to see the dramatic unities observed will find it in this play.

III. The Historical Situation

1. Browning has marked the piece "Time, 14 —."[1]

2. The tragedy is in fact set in the war between Florence and Pisa in 1405–1406.

3. But we do not find among the commanders for Florence in that war a Moorish general named Luria. Nor do we find any of the names which Browning has given to the other characters in his drama. The fact simply is that Browning has created the great character of Luria and has consistently surrounded him with imaginary persons, and has set them in a war whose events are historical. It is, however, a fact that in 1406 Pisa's fortunes were not decided by a battle, as in Browning's drama, but by Pisa's surrender after a long siege. But there seems to be no "14—" in which Browning's drama fits at all, except 1406.

4. It is a fact that the commander-in-chief of the Florentine forces in the early part of the war of 1405–1406 was not a Florentine, but Count Bertoldo Orsini,[2] — the same who had been in command of the expedition against Pisa in 1404. Orsini, however, continued as commander-in-

[1] At the opening, p. 379.

[2] The Orsini were one of the oldest and most powerful families of Rome, and had branches in other parts of Italy. Their feud with the Colonna family is famous. In the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, many of the Orsini became distinguished in the Church and many in the military profession.

chief for only a few months. The Florentines were impatient and thought he was not accomplishing enough, and he was replaced early in 1406 by Count Obizzo di Montegarulli.[1]

5. The wider setting of *Luria* is the Italy of five hundred years ago, — Italy broken up into separate states, usually each with some city as a centre, having different forms of government, independent of one another, and frequently at war with one another. Modern united Italy, of course, dates from 1870. And to find an earlier united Italy — united in reality, not merely in name — we shall have to go back to the days of the Roman Empire.

6. There was sure to be trouble between Florence and Pisa, — both on the Arno — Florence among the Etruscan hills, with her crown of commerce and literature and art — Pisa fifty miles to the westward, six miles from the mouth of the river. Naturally, in the rivalry of these two cities, the trouble began early, and there were many things which complicated and aggravated it. It could never be settled until Florence ruled Pisa. But the Pisans were an ambitious people and had a history of which they were proud.[2] They were a people of independent spirit and were hard fighters; and not until this memorable year of 1406 was the conquest of Pisa accomplished. The Florentines sent an expedition against the Pisans in the early

[1] S. Ammirato, *Istorie Fiorentine*, Florence, 1647, vol. II, pp. 919, 922; T. A. Trollope, *A History of the Commonwealth of Florence*, London, 1865, vol. II, p. 328. Ammirato (p. 919) puts Bertoldo Orsini down as "Conte di Soana" (Count of Soana). The spelling of Count Obizzo's name given above is after Trollope. Ammirato (p. 922) spells it "Obizo da Montegarullo."

[2] In the eleventh century the republic of Pisa was flourishing and was reckoned one of the chief commercial powers of the Mediterranean. Florence's prosperity and power began in the twelfth century.

months of 1404, but it was turned back from the gates of Pisa and proved practically fruitless. The war was again set on foot in September, 1405, but little was accomplished that winter. But early in the following spring, Pisa was closely besieged, and on Oct. 9, 1406, after the Pisans had been reduced to extreme straits, the Florentines took possession of the city. It should be added, however, that although conquered by Florence in 1406, Pisa regained her independence in 1494, and successfully resisted Florence in 1499, 1504, and 1505, and did not finally submit till 1509. But from the conquest which she suffered in 1406, Pisa never really recovered.[1]

7. It was the custom of the time all over Europe to hire soldiers for the wars, and a large number of men were soldiers of fortune and made a good living that way as officers or privates, because there was always some war needing men. It was only natural that in the South of Europe many of these soldiers should be Moors —a splendid race of fighters, hot-blooded, brave, capable. One such has been immortalized — Othello, the Moor in the service of the republic of Venice[2] — immortalized in one of Shakespeare's greatest plays. It is altogether natural, then, for Robert Browning to set another Moor here in command of the army of Florence.

8. It is known from history that Florence in her wars hired many foreign[3] captains, and also that the government of Florence surrounded such officers, while in her employ, with spies and regarded them with suspicion, —

[1] See T. A. Trollope, *A History etc.* as above, vol. II, pp. 337, 338.

[2] Speaking offhand, without taking up the discussion of the relation of Shakespeare's *Othello* to Giraldi's novel and whether there was such a historical person as Othello.

[3] "Foreign" used in the sense of being not Florentines.

simply because, being foreigners, there was danger that they might take advantage of Florence to advance their own ends. Such foreign officers were frequently accompanied by Florentines appointed by the commonwealth. These were the "commissaries" — not in our military sense of officers having charge of transportation and provisions for the troops, as in our "commissary department," but in the more general sense of *commissioners*, to represent Florence's interests and to report on the general's movements. That is, they were not necessarily soldiers, but civil officers representing the Signory.[1] Ammirato,[2] in his history of Florence,[3] relates that when Orsini, in com-

[1] The men who were actually Florence's commissaries in the spring of 1406 were Maso degli Albizzi (head of the powerful Albizzi family) and Gino Capponi. They went down to the neighborhood of Pisa on Mch. 4th. In Sept. the commissaries in the Florentine camp were Gino Capponi and Bartolemmeo Corbinelli. (Trollope, vol. II, pp. 329, 331). Capponi was made the first Florentine governor of Pisa (for eight months). His history of this war is a document of prime authority. It will be found in Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, vol. XVIII, Milan, 1731, cols. 1127–1148.

[2] Scipione Ammirato, the Elder, — born at Lecce in the kingdom of Naples in 1531; was sent to Naples to be educated; was intended by his father for the legal profession, but chose rather to take orders in the Church; lived some time in Venice, and then returned to Naples; came to Florence in 1569, and was appointed by Grand Duke Cosimo de' Medici (Cosimo, the Great) to write the Florentine history; was made a canon of the Cathedral of Florence; died in Florence 1601. At his death, he made his secretary, Christofero del Bianco, his heir on condition that del Bianco should adopt the name of Ammirato. Accordingly, he is known as Scipione Ammirato, the Younger. Several of Ammirato's works were, after his death, edited by this Scipione Ammirato, the Younger.

[3] Ammirato's *Istorie Fiorentine* is in two parts and brings the history down to 1574. It was published as follows: Part I, 2 vols. folio, Florence, 1600; Part II, 1 vol. folio, Florence, 1641; Part I, with additions by Scipione Ammirato, the Younger, reissued, 2 vols. folio, Florence, 1647. The set in the Boston Public Library consists of Part I in the two vols. of 1647 (paged consecutively) and Part II in the vol. of 1641, numbered on the back as vol. III.

mand of Florence's troops, marched to the gates of Pisa in 1404, expecting to take the city, — the expedition which proved practically fruitless, — he was accompanied by three commissaries, whose names Ammirato gives.[1] Trollope goes on to give us a sample of the spirit in which these commissaries were sent:

> "For, although we have every confidence in the honour and fidelity of our general, you see it is always well to be on the safe side. And in the matter of receiving possession of a city . . . we might as well send some of our own people to be on the spot." [2]

9. Furthermore, it is one of the notorious facts of history that Florence, swayed by the faction which, for the moment, might be in power, was often ungrateful to those who had done much for her, — treated them with jealousy and suspicion, exiled or executed them. The great Dante

[1] Ammirato, *Istorie Fiorentine*, vol. II, p. 904. Trollope, vol. II, p. 312, has names the same, with slight modifications in spelling.

[2] T. A. Trollope, *A History of the Commonwealth of Florence*, London, 1865, vol. II, p. 312.

Prof. Henry S. Pancoast, in *Poet-Lore*, 1889, vol. I, pp. 557, 558, quotes Trollope's statement, a part of which we have given above. Pancoast presents it under the mistaken idea that it is a translation of Ammirato's words. Miss Porter and Miss Clarke (*Camberwell Ed* of Browning, vol. III, pp. 329, 330) and Berdoe (*Browning Cyclopædia*, p. 261), following Pancoast without looking the matter up, fall into the same error. In both cases, all the misprints in the excerpt as it appeared in *Poet-Lore* are faithfully preserved. The worst of these is calling Count Bertoldo Orsini "a Ventusian captain" where Trollope has "a *Venturiere* captain" (Italian, *Venturiere*, an adventurer). A careful examination of the passage (Part I, Bk. XVII, Year 1404, Gonfalonier 675, *i.e.* in the ed. of 1647, vol. II, p. 904) in which Ammirato gives an account of this expedition shows nothing there, nor in the pages following, which resembles what Trollope gives after naming the three commissaries. And an examination of the passage and its context in Trollope's history (reference as above) shows that he does not quote it, nor intend it to be taken as a translation from Ammirato. Frequently in his history Trollope speaks in this way — "we," identifying himself with the Florentines of whom he is writing.

was banished in 1302, through the influence of his enemies, the Neri family, and spent the last nineteen years of his life in humiliation and exile, wandering from place to place. Within the thirty years preceding the conquest of Pisa, many had had the experience of being expelled from Florence through the schemes and accusations of their opponents. Some, like Michele di Lando,[1] had tried sincerely and unselfishly to serve the people. Others suffered on account of the rivalry between the leading families. In 1433, even the Medici found what such treatment was like, when their head, Cosimo (the Elder), was exiled at the instigation of the Albizzi family. When recalled to Florence a year later, he in turn drove into exile in all directions those who had opposed him or were likely to do so.

10. Browning is, then, well within historical probabilities when he sets Luria in such circumstances as we find him in at the opening of this play.

IV. The Story

1. The war is on between Florence and Pisa. The men of Lucca, a dozen miles to the northeast, have thrown in their fortunes with the Pisans. We are introduced to the crisis of the war. Luria, the splendid soldier from the East, has been appointed commander-in-chief of Florence's army and has outgeneraled Tiburzio, commander of the Pisans. He has seized the several points of vantage and shuts Pisa (*i.e.* the army of Pisa) safe from help on every side. The Lucchese arrive too late. Luria must, in the battle he delivers now, beat Pisa's best troops and first of chiefs — Tiburzio.[2]

[1] Exiled in 1378.

[2] The substance and many of the phrases of p. 379, ll. 8–13.

"Luria holds Pisa's fortune in his hand." [1]

As Act I opens, it is expected that the battle will begin in an hour.[2]

2. But Luria is surrounded on every side by jealousy, suspicion, and espionage:

a. Puccio, the former commander of the Florentine army, removed by the government, is now Luria's chief officer. And it is hard for him, and he is jealous and bitter. He is full of complaints as to Luria's conduct of the campaign and has furnished notes on the matter to the commissary, — little dreaming, however, how these notes were to be used. In Act III when he finds how his notes actually were used, he is amazed. With him it was only jealousy and sensitiveness at having another man appointed over him. He says:

> "It was not for a trial — surely, no —
> I furnished you those notes from time to time?
> I held myself aggrieved — I am a man —
> And I might speak, — ay, and speak mere truth, too,
> And yet not mean at bottom of my heart
> What should assist a — trial, do you say?
> You should have told me!" [3]

But in spite of the fact that the harm he has done has been more than he intended, Puccio's real attitude must be recognized: there's Puccio all the while, sensitive, critical, jealous, with an eye on Luria's every movement. See it at the beginning of Act I, see it at the beginning of Act III.

b. Then there's Braccio, the commissary of the republic of Florence, — constantly sending reports of Luria's movements and quite incapable of believing that Luria is serving Florence for any generous ends. This is the old fault of the entirely selfish man — his inability to understand the

[1] P. 379, l. 15. [2] P. 379, ll. 1, 2. [3] P. 390, ll. 42–48.

generous man's generosity — his projecting himself into the generous man and misinterpreting his motives. Braccio, in all sincerity, fears what Luria may do when he has conquered Pisa and has at his back an army unemployed — an army which already fairly worships him.[1]

And Luria has, in his great unsuspicious way, done plenty of things that can be misinterpreted. It is only the little man who shapes his conduct by the constant question "What are people going to think of this?" Luria has had "a dallying interchange of courtesies" with the Pisan commander. He has even dropped such remarks as we hear him making in Act I when he says what will they do with him after the war is over — that he will be dangerous if his strength is not employed — that one with half the power he possesses grows formidable.[2] This is simply ingenuous jest; the great Moor is as frank as a child. He laughs at them and even starts to ask jokingly what Florence would do if he should combine forces with Tiburzio, and is cut short by a trumpet outside before he can conclude the sentence.[3] All this is just his way of teasing scared little men, less regal than himself.

But every act and syllable is reported by Braccio to Florence, and exaggerated and given a sinister meaning. And the upshot is that, this very day when Luria fights the decisive battle with the Pisans, he is being *tried for treason* in Florence on the evidence which Braccio has furnished.[4] Such trial of a man in his absence seems to us

[1] Nothing is finer than soldiers' devotion to a real commander. The attitude certainly is akin to worship. Cf. p. 380, l. 55.

[2] P. 383, ll. 60–67. [3] P. 383, ll. 72–75.

[4] It would be more accurate to say that the trial has been going on for some time and concludes to-day,— to-day is the time for the court's verdict. That this is the situation is shown by many passages, *e.g.* p. 380, ll. 28, 29, 46–52; p. 390, ll. 32–39.

pretty bad, but probably was quite in conformity with ways of doing in many parts of Europe 500 years ago. And Luria, altogether in ignorance of what is going on, is eager to join battle for Florence against Pisa.

c. Braccio's secretary, Jacopo (nicknamed "Lapo" [1]), is only a part of Braccio's doing, although he sometimes argues against the representation of Luria's acts and words which Braccio makes him write to Florence.[2] But Braccio overrules him, of course. Jacopo's personality is not strong and his position is so subordinate that he can carry little weight.

d. But there is another influence, more subtle than any of these, weaving its plot about the great unsuspecting soldier Luria. That is the influence of a noble lady of Florence, Domizia.[3] She has followed Luria to the war with the sole purpose of finally accomplishing through him her revenge on Florence. For her two brothers, Porzio and Berto, who served Florence, have been accused, tried, and condemned — the one sent into exile, the other to execution.[4] Her father has died of a broken heart. But she lives to have revenge. She knows bitterly the quality of Florentine ingratitude. She suspects that Florence will not reward Luria, — may even treat him with indignity, or something worse. If she is at hand to set him on when, with the victorious army at his back, he is stung to vent his anger on Florence, she will through him feed full her revenge on the city she hates. So she is constantly drawing the web closer about Luria, to use him as the tool of her revenge.[5]

[1] P. 379, *Persons;* p. 380, ll. 30, 32, 58; and often.

[2] See *e.g.* the conversation p. 380, l. 30–p. 382, l. 17.

[3] She is of the Traversari family, p. 392, l. 12.

[4] P. 384, ll. 52–71 (cf. ll. 83, 84); p. 392, ll. 12–20.

[5] See p. 384, ll. 35–84; p. 388, ll. 43–46; p. 390, ll. 40, 41, 48–50; p. 395, l. 57–p. 396, l. 32. Cf. p. 381, ll. 64–76.

3. In the midst of all this tangle of suspicion, spying, and plotting, walks Luria, the commander of the army, the idol of his soldiers. And there are, besides his soldiers, two others who believe in him:

a. One is Husain, a Moor, his friend, who warns him not to trust these Florentines; Husain has an instinct that they are against Luria.[1]

b. The other one who believes in Luria is Tiburzio, the Pisan commander, who honors Luria from his soul as a foeman worthy of his steel, and admires the man who has outgeneraled him and whose glory is in a fair fight.[2]

4. It is the morning of the battle, and Luria is sure of victory. It is Puccio who, in spite of all his jealousy, declares that

"Luria holds Pisa's fortune in his hand."[3]

It is Puccio who, in spite of all his jealousy, adds that this Moor justifies Florence's choice,

"In no point has this stranger failed his friends."[4]

But when Puccio is gone out, Braccio tears up the letter which has been written under Puccio's direction, and prepares another letter casting further suspicions upon Luria and urging the court to send Luria's sentence to-day.[5]

Luria delays the battle. His hope is that the men of Lucca will arrive, — so that he may have them and the Pisans together and make a clean sweep of them all. He has an irresistible advantage; Pisans — Lucchese — together, he will sweep away for Florence's sake. And so the battle waits till noon.

[1] See p. 385, ll. 18–76. Cf. p. 394, l. 55–p. 395, l. 56.
[2] See p. 386, l. 15–p. 387, l. 41. Cf. p. 392, ll. 23–47; p. 401, ll. 6–30.
[3] P. 379, l. 15. [4] P. 380, ll. 8–13.
[5] P. 380, ll. 18–29, with the stage directions; cf. p. 382, l. 17.

5. In the second Act, a man from the Pisan army comes to call on Luria. Supposed at first to be a messenger, this man turns out to be the Pisan general Tiburzio himself. And he has come, not to make overtures for surrender now that his army is caught, but he has come for Luria's own sake. Tiburzio's men have intercepted, over and over again, the letters sent by Braccio to Florence.[1] And from these letters Tiburzio knows how the case against Luria has been developed. He brings to Luria now, still unopened, the letter we saw Braccio dictating in Act I, and tells Luria to open that and confirm what he is saying. Tiburzio urges that Florence hates Luria. Luria is not bound by blood to Florence. He is a foreigner. Join Pisa now, and Pisa will love and honor him. Such is the temptation.

The great Moorish soldier is bewildered like a man who has received a sudden blow. He tells Tiburzio to go back to his army and, when he arrives there, to sound his trumpet. If there is no answer from Luria's trumpet, the Pisan chief is to understand that Luria will desert Florence and join Pisa. If Luria's trumpet answers, it means that he stays with Florence and fights out the battle.

[1] We need not be confused over how it could be that Tiburzio could intercept the letters and yet the letters could reach Florence and be used against Luria. Browning has made it perfectly clear. *Two copies* of the letters in each instance were sent simultaneously by separate messengers — a military precaution, so that if one messenger was captured or killed, still there was a chance that the other one might get through. We hear the directions in Act I (p. 379, ll. 18–20; cf. p. 380, l. 18) as to sending the present letter in duplicate that way. Of course, this is put in by Browning so that we will draw the inference that such was Braccio's usual plan in dispatching his communications to the Signory. And it has often turned out that Tiburzio's men have captured one messenger, but the other has reached Florence. Apparently it has not occurred to Braccio that his letters' falling into the enemy's hands could in any way work to thwart his plot against Luria, even if he knows that sometimes only one messenger has gotten through.

When the Pisan commander is gone, Braccio, Puccio, and Domizia all come in. Luria, in utter frankness, shows them the letter which Tiburzio has given him, and asks them if he shall open it and find how Florence will reward him. And as Tiburzio's trumpet rings out in the distance, Luria tears the unopened letter into pieces and commands Puccio to sound the Florentine trumpet in reply, — to set the battle on.

6. Act III is in the afternoon after the battle. The Pisans are defeated and Tiburzio, their commander, is a prisoner. Puccio, in jealousy, tries to criticise the movement of the troops and Luria's personal participation in the fighting, but grudgingly acknowledges that it is a splendid victory. Even Braccio admits that "this battle saves Florence." [1] But a cloud comes over Luria's joy of victory. Instead of approaching him with honest thanks and sincere admiration, these Florentines seem more jealous and suspicious than ever. He sees it now, as Husain had seen it before. It is more apparent to Luria now, after what Tiburzio told him. Luria's dream of how he would help and honor Florence seems to be passing into something very different just as it was coming true:

> "This instant while I speak
> Is like the turning-moment of a dream
> When something changes in the friendly eyes
> . . . so slight, so slight . . .
> And yet it tells you they are dead and gone,
> Or changed and enemies, for all their words.
> Come! I feel it in my blood,
> My eyes, my hair, a voice is in my ears
> That spite of all this smiling and soft speech
> You are betraying me." [2]

[1] P. 389, ll. 70, 71.

[2] P. 389, l. 74; p. 390, ll. 1, 5–8, 16–19.

And Braccio admits that charges have been lodged against Luria in Florence and that a trial is there being held, and finally that the verdict will arrive in camp to-night. Braccio claims that Florence has the right thus to treat with suspicion any individual, for the sake of safety to the whole state.

What shall Luria do, treated thus in his hour of triumph over Pisa, burning with anger for being accused of treason, goaded now by Domizia to turn against Florence, and urged again by Tiburzio to go over to the side of Pisa and take command of the army of the Pisans and Lucchese? Luria never loses his self-control. He answers that he will wait until his sentence comes from Florence at night, before he does anything. He sets Tiburzio free and sends Braccio to Florence with this word from Luria to the Signory:

"That while I wait my sentence, theirs waits them." [1]

7. Act IV, at evening, shows us Husain and Domizia each urging Luria to crush Florence. But besides this, the Act shows two things even more significant:

a. One is, that some word has gotten about among the Florentine army as to the plots against Luria and the trial in which these have culminated, and the army, idolizing him more, if possible, since the battle of the day than before, waits simply for a sign from him to overturn the government of Florence.[2]

b. And the other significant thing which this Act shows us is Luria talking to himself of his love and admiration for Florence. What would it avail to wreak his vengeance

[1] P. 393, l. 25.

[2] This is readily gathered from Puccio's conversation with Jacopo, especially the part of it p. 393, l. 79–p. 394, l. 54. Notice p. 394, ll. 1–10, 43–53.

on Florence? He loves Florence so much that, if he injured Florence, it would be only hurting himself. He sees that when the rage for vengeance is past, it would but darken his own life to know that Florentines walk with sadder step because he turned the army against them. He cannot do it. He will not compromise. Rather, he takes from his breast a little vial and drinks the slow poison, — the only thing he brought with him from his own land.[1]

8. The fifth Act, later in the night, shows the effect which this man's nobility and sincerity have in the lives of others. One by one they turn to him, — those who were jealous of him, suspected him, or plotted against him:

a. Knowing that his time is short, Luria is impressing upon Puccio the details of new fortifications for Florence; and when Puccio marvels, expecting that Luria is going over to Pisa's side, yet here he is working on plans to conclude a line of fortifications which will make Florence stronger against Pisa — indeed, will make Florence "queen o' the country" — Luria gives Puccio to understand that he is not going to Pisa. He does not undertake to explain, but hopes he will not be so far away but that he may

[1] Luria has carried this with him as a last resort against dishonor. (Cf his words p. 397, ll. 23–31: he had thought to drink it in defeat — he drinks it now after victory.) Some such resort has been in accordance with the customs of many peoples. The ancient Romans are an illustration. Compare also the Samurai of old Japan, — with the two swords, the long one to be used against the enemy, the short one against himself in time of extremity. The survival of the Samurai spirit was seen in the recent Russo-Japanese war when, in several instances, Japanese officers who had been taken prisoners promptly committed suicide.

Luria's using poison instead of sword or dagger has been referred to in our remarks in connection with Tresham's suicide at the end of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*. It is possible that Browning had information that, among the Moors, it was the custom for men of uncompromising spirit to carry a "quiet remedy" like this. Or it may be that he has conjectured that such would be a custom consistent with Moorish character.

"hear, enjoy and praise each happy blow" which Puccio strikes for Florence.[1] In answer to his further questions, Puccio is assured that Luria has a friend to count on, an all-potent friend.[2] When Puccio protests that he himself will get credit, not due him, for ideas which were Luria's, Luria is glad to have it so.[3] And Puccio cannot resist such magnanimity; he feels his own unworthiness, confesses his past folly, and swears that at the worst he will follow Luria to exile or to death.[4] And Luria says:

"One face is left to take into the night." [5]

b. Then comes Jacopo, the secretary, and confesses what a change Luria's nobleness has wrought in him; no more will he be a tool in Braccio's hands — he has now a will and courage of his own; he offers all there is of him to Luria in loyalty and obedience.[6] And Luria is glad.[7]

c. And Domizia comes and talks with Luria. Even before she learns his decision, she knows it will be a generous one; and she sees that his generosity is so much nobler than her hunger after revenge. His nobleness has transformed her, and she wants him to spare Florence after all.[8]

d. And as midnight draws near, the men are back from Florence.[9] Tiburzio, the Pisan, himself has been there since Luria set him free, and has exonerated Luria. And Braccio, the chief plotter, has told the truth in Florence —

[1] P. 398, ll. 14–17.

[2] P. 398, ll. 29–31. Notice Luria's answer, "He waits me."

[3] P. 398, ll. 31–40.

[4] P. 398, ll. 43–68.

[5] P. 398, l. 82; cf. the whole statement ll. 80–82.

[6] P. 399, ll. 1–52, especially ll. 41–52.

[7] P. 399, ll. 53–55.

[8] P. 399, l. 56–p. 400, l. 74, especially p. 399, ll. 56–73, and p. 400, ll. 50–74.

[9] P. 400, ll. 75 sqq.; cf. p. 401, ll. 5, 36.

the truth seen by a new light — and begs now for Luria's pardon; even Braccio changed by the power of this man's character. They come now with full honors for the Moorish captain, clearing him of all suspicions. All free from blame, trusted and applauded by Florence, with a great career opening before him, Luria stands.[1] But even as Braccio speaks, the fatal poison has reached its time. Even as he speaks, he notices that Luria's head sinks lower and lower. And the great soldier is dead.[2]

9. It is a splendid story. But the dramatic construction is often poor. The technical skill shown is not at all equal to that shown in *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.* The conversations are heavy; the speeches often unnaturally long. But after all has been said as to the lack of dramatic art in it, this drama still keeps its hold on our thoughts, because it is a splendid study of the power of the nobility and sincerity of one great soul. That is the real subject of the play — *The Power of the Nobility and Sincerity of a great Soul.*

Therefore, I ask you to let me close the lecture with a few words about

V. The Character of Luria

The central and dominating thing in the play is the character of Luria. All the circumstances are but machinery to show off his character. All the other characters are only to draw his character out.

Amidst all their pettiness, Luria goes serenely on with his large generous purposes. In the midst of their selfish

[1] This is the tenor of Braccio's speech p. 401, ll. 31–47.

[2] The appearance and demeanor of Luria, as the poison takes effect, are reflected in Braccio's speech: Luria's making no answer, p. 401, ll. 37, 42, 46; the sinking of his head, ll. 33, 43.

calculating, he lives and fights for generous motives. He, the barbarian, looks upon Florence with passionate devotion. Her history, her literature, her store of art, all have laid hold on his imagination, until to serve Florence has come to be a sort of religion to him. What cares he, if only he can serve Florence?[1] His bitter anger when he finds how they treat him with suspicion and misrepresentation can only for an hour eclipse his love and veneration for Florence. Desert Florence he never can. And to be misjudged by Florence he can never bear. He has trusted Florence as a child trusts a mother. And he finds that Florence was trying him on suspicion of treason in the hour when he plunged into battle with joy that he was permitted to do this to make Florence safe and proud and happy. And when the disillusionment comes and he knows how Florence feels towards him, and when the temptations crowd upon him to be false to Florence, he puts himself where he can never be accused of disgracing Florence any more.

And his soul bears the fruit which any noble and generous soul must bear in the life of others. And it is no marvel that one by one those who have suspected and plotted come back to tell him that his sincerity and nobility have conquered them.

Once more, as in so many other poems, Browning teaches that it is worth while to live nobly, generously, and with devotion to high purposes.

[1] See his soliloquy at the end of Act IV. This attitude is seen throughout. One of the most striking illustrations is near the end of the fifth Act, p. 401, ll. 1–4, where on being told that there is "a movement of the Lucchese troops southward," he exclaims "Toward Florence?" and instantly, forgetting for a moment that he is almost at the point of death, the ruling passion of his soul flames out in beginning to give an order to protect the city he loved.

XIV

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

Pp. 402–414

WE come now to *A Soul's Tragedy*, the second of the two dramas in No. 8, the last number of *Bells and Pomegranates*, 1846. *A Soul's Tragedy* consists of two acts, — one in blank verse, one in prose. In the subtitle, Browning says:

> "Act first, being what was called the poetry of Chiappino's life; and Act second, its prose."

I. THE PLACE AND DATE OF THE ACTION

In order to understand any one of Browning's works, we must bear in mind the place and the date of the story related. For Browning is unusually faithful to the historical background; and he is true to the customs of the region where the scene is laid. He may invent characters and incidents, as in *Pippa Passes* and in *Luria*, but the setting is correct, and the whole atmosphere of the time is made real and living to a remarkable degree. This very fact constitutes for some of us a difficulty in reading Browning.

So now, in the matter of *A Soul's Tragedy*, the place and the date.

1. The scene of this play, like that of *Pippa* and of *Luria*, is laid in Italy. The place is the city of Faenza, — a city which now belongs to the province of Ravenna. Faenza is twenty[1] miles southwest of the city of Ravenna, fifty

[1] The distance by the railroad is 31 miles, but it is a very devious route.

miles northeast of Florence, and nearly a hundred miles south of Venice. Faenza has, according to the census of 1901, a population of about 22,000.[1] The chief industries of the town are silk and paper.[2]

2. The date of the action in the play is the sixteenth century, as Browning himself indicates at the beginning of the piece: "Time, 15—."

a. In the sixteenth century, a large part of central Italy was papal territory; *i.e.* this was in the days of the temporal power of the Church, and the Pope was king of this region known as the Papal States.

b. Ravenna was on the northeastern borders of the Papal States, and in 1509 both Ravenna and Faenza[3] were annexed to the Papal States by Pope Julius II. Thereupon the government was adjusted so that Rome governed Ravenna and Ravenna governed Faenza.

c. The action in *A Soul's Tragedy* takes place perhaps not long after the annexation of 1509. The drama shows the people of Faenza chafing against government from outside, and in a more or less turbulent mood, which is held in suppression by the resident Provost from Ravenna. For the Italian loves, has always loved, liberty, — a love for liberty carried to such an extreme that for centuries Italy was broken up into separate and warring states, and modern united Italy dates from 1870.

[1] *i.e.* 22,000 in the town proper, not counting the whole commune of Faenza.

[2] A kind of pottery is named *faience* from the name of this town. It is said to have been invented here in 1299. It has been extensively manufactured here, but is produced in several places in many varieties.

[3] Faenza was taken by Cesare Borgia in 1501. When his plans failed, it fell into the hands of the Venetians, with whom it remained for several years, — till it passed to the States of the Church in 1509.

II. The Story

1. Chiappino is one of those who believe in democratic government, — government of Faenza by the people of Faenza. He is an agitator who has agitated perhaps "not wisely, but too well," — so well that he has been fined at least three times and evidently more:[1]

> "These three last fines, no doubt, one on the other
> Paid by Luitolfo."
> "He paid my fines."

2. And now Chiappino is banished by the Provost:

> "My eye, the Provost, who bears all men's eyes,
> Banishes now because he cannot bear."[2]
>
> "A banished fool, who troubles you to-night
> For the last time."[3]
>
> "I leave the city on pain of death."[4]

He has his route laid out:[5] to go out the Lugo gate, go on to Lugo ten miles north, then through Argenta, past San Nicolo,[6] through Ferrara, and on to Venice, where he is safe under a different government.[7]

[1] See p. 403, ll. 70–80. The quotations given above are from ll. 74, 75, 77.
[2] P. 404, ll. 4, 5.
[3] P. 404, ll. 14, 15.
[4] P. 404, l. 80.
[5] P. 406, ll. 47–62.
[6] There is no difficulty in tracing this route except the difficulty raised by this phrase "past San Nicolo" (l. 50). The route tends quite directly toward Venice. It is, of course, probable that Chiappino might go in a somewhat roundabout way to escape detection (he expects to go disguised, ll. 48, 52, 55, 56), but the only San Nicolo I find is impossible. It is away west of Piacenza and not over 30 miles southeast of Milan. Browning must have meant some fort or village of this name which is not on any of the maps to which I have access.
[7] Venice was an independent republic, — had been so for several centuries.

3. This is the evening of his departure. But his true friend, Luitolfo, who is in the good graces of the Provost, has gone to the Provost to beg him to mitigate the sentence of exile which he has pronounced on Chiappino. Act I opens while Chiappino and Eulalia, Luitolfo's betrothed, are waiting for Luitolfo's return from this mission.

4. Eulalia is worried because he has been gone so long.[1] Chiappino for a while does not answer.[2] As soon as he begins to talk, we find that he is cynical and embittered, — humiliated by the fact that his friend Luitolfo has paid his fines for him and now has gone to seek clemency for him, — angry even at their pity.[3] He contrasts Luitolfo's prosperity with his own misfortunes.[4] He is embittered also because he has loved Eulalia but Luitolfo won her.[5] Chiappino claims that his own misfortunes are due to his uncompromising holding to his principles and his fearlessness in expressing them.[6] He disparages Luitolfo's kindness to him.[7] He holds uncompromisingly to his ideals and despises all who look favorably on anything else.[8]

5. He is interrupted in his speech by loud knocking. Knowing it is Luitolfo returned, he adds in fine irony:

> "— bless my hero-friend,
> Luitolfo!" [9]

And when Eulalia exclaims, "How he knocks!" Chiappino sarcastically remarks that probably Luitolfo has come running back frightened because the Provost "shrugged his shoulder." [10]

[1] P. 402, ll. 1–9.
[2] P. 402, ll. 10, 11.
[3] P. 404, ll. 26–29.
[4] P. 403, ll. 5–32; cf. l. 46.
[5] P. 403, l. 80–p. 404, l. 1; cf. p. 405, ll. 22–36.
[6] P. 403, ll. 37–41, 46–67.
[7] P. 404, l. 68–p. 405, l. 19.
[8] P. 405, ll. 48–64.
[9] P. 405, ll. 64, 65.
[10] P. 405, ll. 65–81, especially ll. 70, 71.

6. When the door is opened, Luitolfo rushes in, — garments disordered and stained with blood. Chiappino supposes that the Provost or his guards have struck Luitolfo, and that the blood on his garments is his own blood: he is for going at once himself to take vengeance on the Provost. Luitolfo explains that it is the Provost's blood and supposes that he has killed the Provost. The guards are after Luitolfo and he is doomed. Instantly Chiappino grasps the situation, crowds upon Luitolfo his own disguise and the outline of his route to Venice, takes Luitolfo's vest for the sake of the blood on it, pushes him out of the door and stands in his place to accept the punishment for the crime.

As the throng rushes in, Chiappino declares himself the one who killed the Provost, but suddenly it becomes evident that the crowd is the enthusiastic populace proclaiming as patriot and deliverer the man who struck the Provost, — the fact being that the Provost's guards have fled with him in their hands toward Ravenna.

When it turns out that the one who smote the Provost is hailed as patriot and hero, Eulalia's eyes challenge Chiappino to tell the truth and give Luitolfo the honor. He answers aside that he understands, but this is no time to do it; he will explain it to the people to-morrow when they are calmer. So he goes with the crowd triumphantly to the market-place.

This whole thing might easily happen just so in the evening and take this unexpected turn, when you consider the attitude of the people toward the Provost appointed by Ravenna.

The whole scene from Luitolfo's entrance to the end of the Act is one of extraordinary vividness and rapidity.[1]

[1] P. 406, l. 1–p. 407, l. 47.

7. Act II is written in simple and beautiful prose.

It is exactly a month [1] after that memorable night when the guards fled toward Ravenna with the wounded Provost — *wounded*, not dead. Now the crowd is assembled in front of the Provost's palace at Faenza to hear a new Provost proclaimed. Luitolfo *in disguise*, mingling with the crowd, learns some interesting things, — things which Eulalia did not tell him in her letters.[2] Now he learns that Chiappino is esteemed by the people as one who "rose in solitary majesty" and "dealt the godlike blow," [3] and that he is to be proclaimed Provost to-day. Luitolfo learns also that the people have a very poor opinion of himself (Luitolfo) and of his disappearance a month ago. Representing himself to be a friend of Luitolfo and asking a few questions, he easily learns these things,[4] and his informants throw in the additional cheering information that Chiappino is expected to succeed to Luitolfo's estates and probably to marry Eulalia to whom Luitolfo was engaged.[5] Luitolfo, a good deal upset by the whole information, decides to see Chiappino and Eulalia before allowing himself to believe it all.[6]

The conversation in the crowd is very good. It includes, besides the points we have just noted, an account of the visit, a month ago, of Ogniben, the Pope's Legate, and of how he handled the situation, especially his handling of Chiappino.[7] Ogniben comes now a month later to complete the matter.

[1] P. 407, ll. 48–56, especially ll. 52, 53; cf. p. 409, ll. 76, 77.
[2] See his comment, p. 409, ll. 86–97.
[3] P. 407, ll. 77–79; cf. ll. 53–56.
[4] P. 407, l. 48–p. 408, l. 43.
[5] P. 408, ll. 43–48; p. 409, ll. 74–85.
[6] P. 409, ll. 97–100.
[7] This part of the conversation is p. 408, l. 52–p. 409, l. 74.

8. Just before the Pope's Legate enters to carry out the ceremonies, Luitolfo observes Chiappino and Eulalia come in. They are discussing the change which Chiappino has undergone. Eulalia is keen and searching:

a. She taxes Chiappino with having changed his principles. He hedges and will not confess it.[1]

b. She taxes him with having changed the love which he so vehemently professed for her. She is not saying that she returned his love, — she is simply testing him on the grounds he had announced as his. Again he hedges and expatiates.[2]

c. Then she questions him about the change in his friendship for Luitolfo, in thus taking honor due Luitolfo. He claims that the deed of striking the Provost was his *in intention*, therefore his now just the same, because Luitolfo did it without premeditation.[3]

9. Now comes in the Pope's Legate, Ogniben, — suave, subtle, accustomed to wheedle turbulent men until he finds out the truth and has his way, while they imagine he agrees with them.

Nothing could be done more flatteringly and shrewdly than his conversation now with Chiappino, all the time protesting, as he leads him on, that he is only developing the ideas on Chiappino's own foundations. But Ogniben has not known "three-and-twenty leaders of revolts"[4] for nothing, and he is quite sure that Chiappino did not strike the blow at the Provost a month ago, although he professes that the wounded Provost did not know who wounded him. (Of course, the Provost knew, and had told Ogniben.) So, after playing long enough with Chiap-

[1] P. 409, l. 101–p. 410, l. 30. [2] P. 410, ll. 31–47. [3] P. 410, ll. 48–67.
[4] His stock remark: p. 408, ll. 79–81; p. 410, ll. 68, 69; cf. the significant change p. 414, ll. 37, 38.

pino, Ogniben remarks to him that he will proclaim him Provost with one "novel stipulation," viz. "that in the event of the discovery of the actual assailant of the late Provost —" he is interrupted by Chiappino, but goes serenely on — "why, he shall suffer the proper penalty, of course." [1]

Then turning to the populace,[2] the proclamation making Chiappino Provost being conspicuous by its absence, Ogniben asks whimsically:

> "My good friends! (nay, two or three of you will answer every purpose) — who was it fell upon and proved nearly the death of your late Provost? Who dealt the blow that night, does anybody know?" [3]

Luitolfo steps forward and confesses the deed.[4] Chiappino has nothing to say.[5] Ogniben, shaping a homily on the text "Let whoso thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," [6] sends Luitolfo home without punishment and looks humorously after Chiappino, who has found a sudden interest in the street leading toward the Lugo gate, in the direction of Venice; [7] then takes the keys of the Provost's palace and goes his way, with the remark, "I have known *Four*-and-twenty leaders of revolts." [8]

[1] P. 413, ll. 59–72; cf. also ll. 73–75.

[2] Ogniben and Chiappino have not gone up the palace-steps: "See the good people crowding about yonder palace-steps — which we may not have to ascend, after all" (p. 413, ll. 83–85).

[3] P. 413, ll. 85–88, 92, 93. [4] P. 413, ll. 94–111.

[5] This is plain from Ogniben's remark p. 413, ll. 122–124.

[6] 1 Cor. 10: 12. The text is given above as quoted by Browning, p. 413, ll. 120, 121.

[7] In Ogniben's last speech (p. 413, ll. 116 sqq.), the whole closing action of the play is reflected. His remarks as he sees Chiappino running away are exceedingly good: p. 414, ll. 29–34; cf. p. 413, ll. 124 sqq., where he sees Chiappino getting ready to make a dash.

[8] P. 414, ll. 37, 38. It was "three-and-twenty" up to this point.

III. The Character-Studies in the Play

The character-studies in the play are unusually good.

1. Luitolfo is a big-hearted true friend. He has grown up with Chiappino and does not forsake him when Chiappino by his agitations has gotten himself into trouble. Luitolfo pays his friend's fines. He never suspects his friend of being in love with Eulalia, his own fiancée. Luitolfo goes to the Provost to plead for a change in the sentence of banishment finally pronounced on Chiappino, and it is loyalty to Chiappino which makes him answer the Provost's attitude at last with a blow. When Luitolfo returns in disguise a month later, he is slow to believe that Chiappino has availed himself of the unforeseen success of that blow.

Luitolfo is a consistent character and altogether a likable sort of fellow.

2. Eulalia is a character not so plainly evident. She loves Luitolfo sincerely and seems to be entirely faithful to him. But she is no match for Chiappino's bitter sarcasm. When he declares that he loved her before Luitolfo won her, she does not answer with the splendid ringing devotion which her accepted lover deserves. She asks:

> "What forced
> Or forces me to be Luitolfo's bride?" [1]

When Chiappino has taken Luitolfo's place and expects to die, he in his hard reckless mood sneers: "How natural to sing now!" She makes the answer, rather weak and nerveless under the strain of the tense crisis: "Hush and pray!" [2] When the fact comes out that the populace hail as hero the man who struck the Provost, she lacks the

[1] P. 404, ll. 61, 62. [2] P. 407, l. 6.

courage to speak out — leaves them to believe that Chiappino is the man. There was nothing to gain and everything to lose for Luitolfo by her silence.

When she writes to Luitolfo about how things are going, she has not told him the facts about the attitude of the people nor about Chiappino's ambitions. It is all a surprise to Luitolfo when he comes back in disguise and mingles with the crowd. This surely is not very loyal to her absent and misrepresented lover.

When she questions Chiappino, in the second Act, as to the love he has professed for her — now that he is about to be elevated to so high a state — we are not obliged to think that she returns or even accepts his love, but there is nothing to prove that she does not. Her remark when Luitolfo appears and is exonerated is certainly cold-blooded enough for anyone. There is no cry of joy at meeting, as there was no cry of loss when he went away. All she says is:

> "I was determined to justify my choice, Chiappino, — to let Luitolfo's nature vindicate itself. Henceforth we are undivided, whatever be our fortune." [1]

This is not love. This is cold calculating judgment, and one is tempted to think she would have followed Chiappino's prosperous star, if he had continued to prosper and had allowed her to share his prosperity. Luitolfo is not to be unduly congratulated upon having won such a woman for his wife.

3. The most fascinating character in the play is Ogniben, the Pope's Legate. Accustomed to dealing with turbulent men in unsettled times, he takes this in the most serene and genial mood, remarks "I have known three-and-twenty

[1] P. 413, ll. 112–115.

leaders of revolts," smoothes the people's temper, and brings them round to a desire for law and order. This was on his first visit.[1] When he next comes, he falls back on his usual observation, "I have seen three-and-twenty leaders of revolts," [2] plays with Chiappino's conceit and dissembling, and finally, laughing to himself, lets Chiappino down with an uncomfortable thud, and goes serenely back to Ravenna, with a farewell remark, "I have known *Four*-and-twenty leaders of revolts." He can tell a good story, can pour oil on troubled waters, can be of the opinion of the man he is talking with and hold his own opinion still, can help a man make a fool of himself in the sophistries of that man's own views, meantime thinking how all this furnishes material for a sermon, and he can look at what others take so seriously largely as a huge joke.

Altogether, Ogniben is the kind of man who makes one realize that diplomacy is a higher stage of civilization than war is.

4. There remains to speak of the character of Chiappino; and since it is from his character and experience that this drama gets its name *A Soul's Tragedy*, I shall ask you to put down, as the last main point of the lecture,

IV. The Tragedy of the Soul

The tragedy is in the soul of Chiappino.

1. There are some who find fault with the title of the piece and profess themselves unable to see where the tragedy in Chiappino's soul comes in. They argue that

[1] Related to Luitolfo by one of the men in the crowd a month later, p. 408, ll. 64 sqq.

[2] We quote in this paragraph Ogniben's saying as given in connection with the two occasions: *i.e.* the variant "known" (p. 408, l. 80), "seen" (p. 410, l. 68).

Chiappino is hardened and embittered when the play opens and that his action in claiming the unexpected success due to Luitolfo for his blow cannot have injured the soul of Chiappino enough to constitute "a soul's tragedy." [1]

2. But it is certainly a dull reader who does not see the tragedy in Chiappino's soul. Indeed Chiappino is hardened and embittered at the beginning, but the whole point of the drama is that, *nevertheless*, all the remnants of nobleness in him and of loyalty to his friend spring up at the moment of crisis into an overwhelming flame of self-sacrifice, under the impulse of which he makes Luitolfo flee and he himself takes Luitolfo's place, ready, impatient, to declare that it was he who struck the Provost, — expecting in all sincerity to pay the death penalty — to die that Luitolfo may go free and marry the girl whom Chiappino loves in vain. So is Chiappino redeemed, transformed, transfigured, by a great self-sacrificing purpose.

3. And the tragedy is that suddenly finding to his surprise that it is the people who come, hailing as hero and deliverer the man who struck the Provost, then Chiappino *accepts the honor as he had been prepared to accept the penalty*, and does not confess that Luitolfo struck the blow and deserves the praise. So is the noblest movement of his soul almost in a moment transformed into a selfish triumph. This is tragedy enough.

4. But it quickly gathers to itself other elements of soul-tragedy. Chiappino has been a sincere holder of democratic principles, turbulent and unwise in his agitations, but thoroughly in revolt against tyrannical government by a Provost appointed by Ravenna. But now when Fortune has unexpectedly turned in his favor and the

[1] Such essentially is the criticism of Stopford A. Brooke, *The Poetry of Robert Browning*, New York, 1902, pp. 238–240.

power and honor of the Provostship are offered to him, he is willing to receive the office from the very same hands as his predecessor, — the hands of the Pope's Legate from Ravenna. This also is soul-tragedy — the abandonment or compromise of principles for the sake of power and honor.

5. And there is still another element of soul-tragedy here. It is plain in Act I that Chiappino loves Eulalia — passionately and sincerely, but unsuccessfully — and that this failure adds to his bitterness. But when about to be elevated to a position of power and honor, he answers her exclamation "So, the love breaks away too!" [1] with a lot of sophistry which only half conceals the fact that he is throwing her over because of pride as he contemplates occupying so high a place.[2] When Ogniben quizzes him whether he means that he is not going to marry Eulalia after all, Chiappino answers:

> "I must have a woman that can sympathize with and appreciate me, I told you." [3]

Whether Eulalia, after Luitolfo was gone, encouraged Chiappino's love for her or not makes no difference with the fact that once he loved her and now, through change in his fortunes, cares for her no more. This sort of thing has happened many thousands of times in the generations gone by and will happen many thousands of times again, but it is no less an element of soul-tragedy.

6. Sacrificing love because of his pride, sacrificing principles for the sake of power and honor, turning the one greatest and most beautiful impulse of his whole life suddenly into selfish gain, — the tragedy in Chiappino's soul seems to be complete.

[1] P. 410, l. 31. [2] P. 410, ll. 32–47; cf. also his statement in ll. 28–30.
[3] P. 410, ll. 116–122; see also the discussion as it continues immediately

XV

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Pp. 649–906

THE time has come for us to take up the study of *The Ring and the Book.*

I. THE SOURCES

Browning's materials for *The Ring and the Book* are from four sources of information:

1. The "old yellow book."
2. A manuscript pamphlet giving an account of the murder.
3. A pen and ink drawing of Count Guido Franceschini.
4. A water-color sketch of the arms of the Franceschini family.

1. *The "old yellow book."*

a. In the beginning of his great poem, Browning has himself furnished a straightforward account of the old yellow book, which was his major source. He has not, however, mentioned the year when he found it.

There is in the city of Florence, in the Piazza San Lorenzo, a statue by Baccio Bandinelli,[1] — a statue of Giovanni de' Medici, called *Giovanni delle Bande Nere*, "John of the Black Bands," [2] who was killed in battle in 1526. He was the father of Cosimo the Great, who was the first one of the Dukes of Florence to bear the title Grand Duke of

[1] "Baccio's marble," p. 650, l. 22.

[2] P. 650, l. 24.

Tuscany. The statue stands between the Church of San Lorenzo and the Palazzo Riccardi, which was the palace of the famous Medici family.[1]

It was about noon on a market-day[2] in the month of June,[3] and the year must have been 1860,[4] when Robert Browning walked across the Square toward this statue,

> "where sits and menaces
> John of the Black Bands with the upright spear,"[5]

and turning toward the palace-steps, there —

> "precisely on that palace-step
> Which, meant for lounging knaves o' the Medici,
> Now serves re-venders to display their ware,"[6]

he found on a stall, in the midst of all sorts of trash — "odds and ends of ravage," he calls it[7] — an old yellow book, which he immediately bought for a *lira*.[8]

Now, I am somewhat at a loss to understand Robert Browning's own statement that a *lira* is "eightpence English just,"[9] for the *lira* equals the *franc* and is worth between 19 and 20 cents, while eight pence is barely 16 cents. It is not at all likely that Browning would make any such mistake. A gentleman told me some time ago that, when he was in Italy in 1882, the Italian currency was at a great discount. And it is probable that fifty years ago, when Browning was living there, the rate of exchange was such that the *lira* was worth only eight pence, while now it is worth about ten pence.

[1] P. 650, ll. 22–26. [2] P. 650, l. 21. [3] P. 650, ll. 67, 68.

[4] So Hodell, *The Old Yellow Book*, Washington, 1908, p. 237; see also p. 337, note 536, where there is a personal letter to Prof. Hodell from Mr. R. Barrett Browning, saying: "The 'yellow book' was probably picked up in June of 1860." So also Griffin and Minchin, *Life of Robert Browning*, New York, 1910, p. 228.

[5] P. 650, ll. 23, 24. [6] P. 650, ll. 27–29. [7] P. 650, l. 30.

[8] P. 650, ll. 15, 16, 60. [9] P. 650, l. 16.

Anyhow, he bought the book, and buried his head in it as he pursued his way homeward to Casa Guidi on the other side of the Arno, almost opposite the famous Pitti Palace. Very amusing is his description[1] of how he walked through everything reading this book. He declares that by the time he had reached the stairway that goes up to their apartments, he had mastered the contents of the old yellow book,[2] *i.e.* not necessarily had read every word of it, but knew what it was all about.[3] This is no small tribute to his ability as a scholar, when you consider the fact that the book is "part print, part manuscript,"[4] the ink a good deal faded sometimes, and that it is in cramped Latin "interfilleted with Italian streaks."[5]

That evening, on the little balcony on the side of his house just across from San Felice Church the whole story contained in the old yellow book came to life in his imagination; he felt the whole thing become real again. He says:

> "I fused my live soul and that inert stuff."[6]

And again:

> "The life in me abolished the death of things,
> Deep calling unto deep."[7]

Out of this was eventually developed *The Ring and the Book.* But it should be added, which Browning does not add but which Mrs. Orr knew to be the case,[8] that it was four years

[1] P. 650, l. 67–p. 651, l. 19.

[2] P. 651, ll. 20–26; cf. ll. 27 sqq.

[3] P. 651, l. 46; cf. p. 655, ll. 50–60, where he describes himself as absorbed in reading the old yellow book all the afternoon after he got home.

[4] P. 650, l. 62; cf. p. 651, l. 26. "There are in fact only about 10 pages of manuscript out of 260," Hodell, *The Old Yellow Book*, p. 295, note 11.

[5] P. 651, l. 44; cf. ll. 42–45.

[6] P. 655, l. 50.

[7] P. 656, ll. 31, 32.

[8] Mrs. Sutherland Orr, *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, 1 vol. ed., London, 1891, p. 261.

before he definitely began to shape the material into a poem, and that during that time he had offered it to Miss Ogle as material for a novel.[1] It is certainly known that he offered it also to another friend, Mr. W. C. Cartwright.[2] We find from a letter of Browning's written in September, 1862, that he is soon going to work on his "Roman murder story."[3] But it was some two years still before the writing vigorously began,[4] *i.e.* it was after he had seen to the reprinting of some of Mrs. Browning's early writings[5] and after he had gotten out the three-volume edition of his collected works (1863) and had gotten his new volume *Dramatis Personæ* (1864) off his hands.

b. The old yellow book is now in the library of Balliol College, Oxford, of which College Browning was made

[1] Mrs. Orr, as above; Hodell, *The Old Yellow Book*, Washington, 1908, p. 237 (notice Browning's remark to Prof. Corson, quoted by Hodell); Griffin and Minchin, *Life of Robert Browning*, New York, 1910, p. 229.

[2] Griffin and Minchin, *Life of Robert Browning*, p. 229: "It is certain that he offered the story to one of his friends in Rome that winter, Miss Ogle, as subject for a novel; equally certain that he seriously suggested to another friend, Mr. W. C. Cartwright, that he should write an account of it. He went so far as to say he would give him the book." (As to Cartwright, see also p. 218 and p. 281 note.) Mr. Cartwright can hardly be the same as the poetical contemporary to whom Mrs. Orr (p. 261) is "almost certain" Browning offered the book.

[3] This letter is published in Mrs. Orr's *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, as above, pp. 259, 260. It was written from Biarritz, France, to Miss Isa Blagden, and is dated "Sept. 19, '62." Near the end of the letter (p. 260), Browning says: "For me, I have got on by having a great read at Euripides —the one book I brought with me, besides attending to my own matters, my new poem that is about to be, and of which the whole is pretty well in my head, — the Roman murder story, you know."

[4] See Griffin and Minchin, pp. 230, 231. Browning, approaching the end of his task (p. 899, l. 5) calls the book his "four-years'-intimate," probably referring to the four years of constant intimacy with the book while writing the poem 1864–68.

[5] Mrs. Browning's early contributions to *The Academy*, collected and reissued under title *The Christian Greek Poets and the English Poets*, 1863.

Honorary Fellow in October, 1867. In the spring of 1907, I secured permission from the Librarian for myself and several friends to have the case unlocked and to examine thoroughly the old yellow book. It is exactly as Browning describes it — "small-quarto size" [1] ($7\frac{3}{4}$ by 10 inches, one inch thick, about 260 pages), with "crumpled vellum covers." [2] It contains the legal documents relating to the trial of Count Guido Franceschini and four accomplices, who were executed on Feb. 22, 1698, in the Piazza del Popolo in Rome, for murder. It was the rule then in Rome that pleadings of Counsel for prosecution and defense must be submitted to the Court in print.[3] Hence these documents [4] — eleven of them being lawyers' arguments; three, summaries of evidence; and two referring to a subsequent petition to clear Pompilia's reputation. With these 16 official pamphlets have been bound up two unofficial printed pamphlets and three manuscript letters. The legal documents are all printed to fold into narrow space, almost exactly the size of our folded documents. Several of them have been carried so long in the pocket that a heavy black streak runs up and down where the outside of the creased part rubbed against the pocket.[5] These papers were bound into a book by a Florentine named Cencini,[6] into whose

[1] P. 650, l. 62. [2] P. 650, l. 12.

[3] P. 651, ll. 47–82; p. 652, ll. 59–64; p. 822, ll. 15–20.

[4] They were printed at the papal press, at the expense of the government. Browning says: "At Rome, in the Apostolic Chamber's type" (p. 651, l. 55). The imprint is: "Romæ, Typis Rev. Cam. Apost. 1698." ("Rev. Cam. Apost." is for Reverendæ Cameræ Apostolicæ.) The two unofficial pamphlets bear no imprint. A complete table, showing subdivision of the pamphlets according to the nature of their contents, is given by Hodell, *The Old Yellow Book*, p. 230.

[5] Something of this fact Browning has in the poem, p. 658, ll. 31, 32.

[6] P. 658, ll. 33–37; p. 898, l. 70–p. 899, l. 10. Browning infers that Cencini saw to the binding up, because all three of the letters included are

hands they fell; and in this form they were discovered by Robert Browning after all remembrance of the case had faded from the world.

c. The old yellow book has been photographed page by page, and has been reproduced in photographic facsimile, and provided with a translation and complete critical apparatus by Prof. Charles W. Hodell, of the Woman's College of Baltimore, and issued by the Carnegie Institution of Washington.[1] This reproduction, with the translation, additional source-material, critical essay, and notes, makes a work of inestimable value. It is a thesaurus for the study of the sources of *The Ring and the Book*.[2] Apart from its relation to Browning's poem, this collection of documents is very valuable for the study of legal procedure in Italy 200 years ago. One cannot help being surprised that the edition was limited to 600 copies, when he considers the labor and expense of getting it up.[3]

personal letters to Signor Francesco Cencini of Florence, written on the day of Guido's execution, and the third letter, the one by Ugolinucci, says explicitly that he is inclosing most of the documents. Hodell (p. 238) thinks it was probably Cencini who completed the collection and had the papers bound. The title-page of the volume is in handwriting; cf. Browning, p. 651, ll. 17, 18.

[1] *The Old Yellow Book*, Source of Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, in complete Photo-reproduction, with Translation, Essay, and Notes, by Charles W. Hodell, published by the Carnegie Institution of Washington, July, 1908. The volume contains not only the old yellow book, but all the source-material bearing on the case.

[2] A student of Browning's poem who wants just a glimpse of the old yellow book's contents might read, in Hodell's translation as above: (1) Fra Celestino's letter, pp. 45, 46; (2) Pompilia's deposition, pp. 69–73; (3) the peroration of Arcangeli's defense of Count Guido and his associates, pp. 102–104, — this peroration taken bodily into Browning's poem, Bk. VIII; (4) a little of the plea of Bottini, the public prosecutor, *e.g.* pp. 163–166.

[3] The translations alone, with an appropriate introduction and notes by Prof. Hodell, have been issued later as a volume in Everyman's Library. — *The Old Yellow Book*, London and New York, no date.

On the other hand, we had looked forward with keenest anticipations to the appearing of this work, and could not help being somewhat disappointed. I always hesitate to show a class Hodell's reproduction of the old yellow book, because it gives so poor an idea of how the book really looks. Binding up his translation, other source-material, critical essay, and notes along with the reproduction of the old pages makes the present book over twice as thick as the original, — in fact, makes it look more like a volume of an encyclopædia than like the old yellow book. We heartily wish that Prof. Hodell had had an exact reproduction made of the old yellow book, even to a facsimile of the covers, and then had put all the rest of his matter in a second volume. Apparently he was not limited by the Carnegie Institution in the matter of expense,[1] and he could readily have brought the work out in that form. Moreover, the plates for some of the pages have been cleaned up a good deal: I can remember pages in the original which I cannot recognize in the reproduction (I mean in point of soilure), and in many cases the type was surely not so clear as it is here set before us.[2] This, it seems to me, is exceedingly unfortunate; for what we want in a photographic reproduction is not the original text fixed up so that it can be more easily read, but rather all the defects and dimness and smirch of the original, so as to show exactly what it is.

But such considerations as these do not weigh much in comparison with the main fact, viz. that we owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to Prof. Hodell and to the Carnegie Institution for getting into a form in which it is

[1] This can be fairly inferred from Prof. Hodell's words in paragraph 2 of his General Preface, p. 3.

[2] Prof. Hodell gives an explanation in regard to what has been done with pages affected by creasing, General Preface, pp. 4, 5.

available for general study the old yellow book and the other material bearing on the Franceschini case.

2. *The manuscript pamphlet giving an account of the murder.*

This pamphlet is not described by Browning in the poem, probably because he considered it to be simply of supplementary value. I cannot find where the pamphlet is now. It is not in the library of Balliol with the other things relating to *The Ring and the Book*.[1]

This pamphlet was found by one of Browning's acquaintances, in London among a lot of old papers. It is in Italian. The text was printed by the Philobiblion Society in 1870. A part of it was translated by Mrs. Orr in her *Handbook*.[2] The whole pamphlet is now translated by Prof. Hodell from the Philobiblion Society's text, and is included in his edition of *The Old Yellow Book* (pp. 209–213).

This pamphlet is evidently a few years later[3] than the documents in the old yellow book, and is a more popular presentation of the story. It is not so reliable as the old yellow book; it is a secondary source.

Browning used considerable additional information from this source:[4] *e.g.* the name of Pompilia's child Gaetano,[5]

[1] Many of Browning's manuscripts are there, among the treasures of the College.

[2] Mrs. Sutherland Orr, *A Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning*, 6th ed., London and New York, 1892, pp. 83–87. The same is reprinted by Cooke in his Browning *Guide-Book*, Boston and New York, 1893, pp. 333–336; and by Miss Porter and Miss Clarke in the *Camberwell Ed.* of Browning, vol. VII, pp. 336–340 (*i.e.* in the Appendix to vol. II of *The Ring and the Book*). The part translated by Mrs. Orr is "somewhat less than half of the pamphlet" (Hodell, p. 208).

[3] So Hodell, p. 208.

[4] See Hodell, pp. 242, 243. Hodell, in his translation of the pamphlet, shows by Italic type what is new matter, *i.e.* not in the old yellow book. In his notes, he shows very thoroughly all details for which Browning is indebted solely to this pamphlet.

[5] *e.g.* p. 654, l. 73; p. 770, ll. 11, 12; p. 779, ll. 47, 48; p. 780, ll. 40–47; p. 905, ll. 78, 79; p. 906, ll. 25–27.

the fact that Pompilia's dagger-wounds were 22 in number,[1] the fact that the corpses of Pietro and Violante were laid in the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina to be gazed at by the multitude,[2] and many details of the pursuit, capture, and execution of the murderers.[3]

3. *The pen and ink drawing of Count Guido Franceschini.* This drawing was made on a loose sheet of paper shortly before Guido's execution. He has on the clothes in which he was caught; in these same clothes he was executed.[4]

The sketch was sent to Browning by a stranger, who found it in a bundle of drawings and the like which he bought in England.[5] It is now in Balliol library with the other things bearing on *The Ring and the Book*. A memorandum, written in a small hand across the bottom, makes very plain what the picture is.[6]

This picture of Count Guido is reproduced in Hodell's edition of *The Old Yellow Book;*[7] also in the Camberwell Browning.[8]

Browning used this drawing as an assistance in his description of Count Guido. He found a description of him near the end[9] of the pamphlet of which we have just been

[1] Pompilia's monologue, p. 779, ll. 54–57.

[2] At the beginning of Half-Rome, pp. 667, 668.

[3] "Books IV and XII make especially important use of it" (Hodell, p. 243).

[4] This fact is related near the end of the pamphlet account, Hodell, p. 213. Cf. also Browning, p. 898, ll. 57–64.

[5] See Hodell, p. 208, note 45. Unless my memory plays me false, the drawing is marked: "Presented to Robert Browning by M. H." But I did not make a note of that when examining it, and have not had opportunity to see it since the question arose in my mind.

[6] This inscription, or memorandum, can be easily read on Hodell's reproduction of the picture.

[7] Opposite p. 274.

[8] Frontispiece to vol. II of *The Ring and the Book*.

[9] Hodell, p. 213.

speaking; but his description of the nose, bush of beard, leanness, and pallor of Guido[1] surely gain vividness from his having this drawing before him.

4. *The water-color sketch of the arms of the Franceschini family.*

This sketch was sent to Browning by his friend Seymour Kirkup, an artist.[2] He copied it for Browning from a manuscript.[3]

Kirkup's water-color sketch is now pasted in the front of the old yellow book. It is reproduced by Hodell at the beginning of his photographic reproduction of the pages of the old yellow book.

The arms represent a greyhound tied to a palm tree and straining at the leash.

"He stands upon a triple mount of gold."[4]

Browning used the arms as significant of the greed and violence of the Franceschini family.[5]

These are all Browning had:[6] viz. the old yellow book, a

[1] P. 659, ll. 43–45; p. 715, ll. 35–37; p. 783, l. 79; p. 784, l. 47; cf. p. 898, ll. 50–56.

[2] Griffin and Minchin (pp. 203, 206) mention Kirkup in his relations with Browning. Mrs. Orr (p. 219) quotes an account giving some information about him. Hodell (p. 243 and p. 299, note 47) calls him Barone Kirkup (*i.e.* Italian for Baron). The drawing has plainly written on it in Browning's handwriting "from Seymour Kirkup, Florence." Browning in *Pacchiarotto* (p. 1060, l. 36) mentions Kirkup by name.

[3] See the memorandum on the sketch — probably Kirkup's own handwriting — telling where the manuscript is.

[4] P. 892, l. 85.

[5] P. 892, l. 82–p. 893, l. 2; p. 906, ll. 29–33.

[6] Hodell (p. 243; p. 324, notes 386–389; p. 335, note 526) counts as one of the sources Farinacci's *Praxis et Theorica Criminalis*, Lyons, 1606, because from this Browning got his details as to the vigil-torture. Browning cites Farinacci by name, *e.g.* p. 806, l. 17. In note 526, Hodell translates the passage in Farinacci which Browning has followed. But Browning got no detail of plot nor of character from Farinacci. He got simply information

separate manuscript pamphlet containing an account of the murder, a pen and ink drawing of Count Guido Franceschini, and a water-color sketch of the arms of the Franceschini family. The old yellow book was his chief source. In Bk. I and again in Bk. XII,[1] Browning assures us that he tried to find other evidence in Rome and Tuscany, but was not able; the French had burned the records in Rome, and he found in Arezzo only one entry, — that as to an action in behalf of the Franceschini family probably consequent upon Guido's having been executed for murder.[2]

about a form of torture which was mentioned in the sources from which he got his story. Farinacci's work is not, then, to be considered a source for *The Ring and the Book*, any more than are a large number of other works from which Browning learned details of the history and customs of the period.

[1] P. 655, ll. 4–38; p. 905, l. 76–p. 906, l. 35.

[2] There were, however, two bits of evidence which Browning did not find, neither of them court-records. These are mentioned here in a note rather than in the regular course of the lecture, in order to avoid confusing them with sources which Browning actually had. These he never saw; therefore they have no place in a discussion of the sources of *The Ring and the Book* except as they are related to the story which he used. The two things which have come to light since Browning wrote his poem are:

(1) The record of Pompilia's death, in the parish-register of the Church of San Larenzo in Lucina. A photograph of this is given by Hodell, facing p. 280, with translation p. 297, note 24. It does not mention the manner of her death, the words which Browning puts in Pompilia's mouth (p. 770, l. 29) coinciding with the fact standing on the parish-register which Browning never saw.

(2) The other thing is an account of the murder in a collection of murder stories in manuscript form. It was discovered a few years ago in the Royal Casanatense Library in Rome. The Franceschini case is narrative no. 10 in that volume. It is in Italian. It is later than any of Browning's sources, — evidently along in the eighteenth century. It adds not much, but Prof. Griffin calls it "the best prose account of the whole case which is known to exist." It was translated by Prof. Griffin and published in *The Monthly Review*, Nov., 1900; same translation reprinted in Griffin and Minchin's *Life of Browning*, Appendix B, *i.e.* pp. 309–327. It is again translated by Prof. Hodell from a transcript made by a friend of his, and is included in his edition of *The Old Yellow Book*, pp. 217–225.

II. How Browning has Treated his Sources

Prof. Charles W. Hodell undoubtedly knows more of this than does anyone else. He has summed it up in his essay on "The Making of a Great Poem" in his edition of *The Old Yellow Book*, pp. 227–291; also in briefer form in an article in *The Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1908, pp. 407–413.

1. *Browning's faithfulness in details of fact.*

In handling the materials found in the old yellow book, Browning felt an unusual responsibility. It was a new mine. His great desire was to be true to what he had in hand — true to its inner truth — true even in a more real sense than the old yellow book is, with its store of

> "pure crude fact
> Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
> And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since." [1]

Accordingly, he has taken great pains in a discussion of the artist's relation to his raw material, — a discussion carrying the matter out under the figure of the gold and the alloy,[2] and showing a sensitive conscience in the matter.

In Bk. I [3] and again in Bk. XII [4] Browning represents himself as tossing the old yellow book and catching it by the covers. But some who have seen the book in his hands have testified that he handled it almost reverently.[5] No wonder if he did, for he had read the whole book through

[1] P. 650, ll. 12–14 or 63–65 (identical).

[2] The figure is carried out in many places in Bk. I. Cf. the end of Bk. XII.

[3] P. 650, ll. 10–12, 61.

[4] P. 899, l. 4.

[5] So the Rev. John W. Chadwick, in an article "An Eagle-Feather," in *The Christian Register*, Jan. 19, 1888, quoted by Cooke, *Browning Guide-Book*, pp. 337, 338; so Hodell, *The Old Yellow Book*, p. 237, citing Prof. Edward Dowden on the point; similarly in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Mch., 1908, p. 410

eight times.[1] "Browning must have been saturated with the book before he began writing the poem." [2]

Browning's faithfulness in details is very remarkable. Hodell says:

> "With the honesty and minute, painstaking integrity of a historian, he reorganized his material. Names, places, dates, incidents, details of motive, forms of expression, fragments of law are taken from the book in countless profusion. That strange, grotesque medley of law and sophistry in Arcangeli's monologue is in fact a skillful mosaic of scores of fragments taken from all parts of the book and laid in an original design and cemented by irony and humor." [3]

Browning spared no pains:

> "In the matter of the chronology of the tragedy, he is almost painfully accurate to the book. The story therein is definitely dated in most of its detail, though these time-references are much scattered. It is evident the poet has mastered all these dates carefully. He is studiously accurate whenever he mentions in his narrative the time of day, the days of the week, the seasons of the year, intervals of time, or ages of persons. The two opening lines of Pompilia's monologue, which give her age, are accurate to the day." [4]

Caponsacchi says: "There's new moon this eve," [5] and Hodell tells us that Browning would not let that stand until he had consulted an astronomer and had had him figure back to find that there actually was a new moon at

[1] Mrs. Orr, *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, 1 vol. ed., London, 1891, pp. 281, 282: "He had read the record of the case, as he has been heard to say, fully eight times over before converting it into the substance of his poem." Hodell, in both his articles, appeals to Mrs. Orr's statement.

[2] Hodell, *The Old Yellow Book*, p. 255.

[3] Hodell, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Mch., 1908, p. 410.

[4] Hodell, *The Old Yellow Book*, p. 255.

[5] Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, p. 766, l. 10.

that time.[1] Referring to the whole matter of Browning's accuracy in detail, Hodell says:

> "Shakespeare's free modification of the ascertained fact of history is in striking contrast with this minute fidelity to the record of a forgotten crime."[2]

Hodell thinks that "the architecture of the poem, its unusual plan, seems to have been devised with the purpose of the fullest truth-telling concerning the material before the artist." That is, by letting so many speak, from so many different points of view, Browning could preserve all the conflicting testimony and opinion given in the old legal papers:

> "Now the plan Browning has adopted will include all of this contradictory detail. Browning the lover of truth is nowhere more manifest than in the devising of this plan for telling the fullest truth of the book. And he follows it honestly, even to the giving of many facts and motives of the story which run counter to his own interpretation and his own sympathy in the case."[3]

Browning's departures from the details of the book are pointed out by Hodell in his critical essay and his notes. One of the most interesting is Browning's changing the date of the flight from early Monday morning, April 29, 1697, which it actually was, to early Tuesday morning,

[1] Hodell, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Mch., 1908, p. 410; *The Old Yellow Book* pp. 255, 256; p. 310, note 185; p. 337, note 536. In this last note, a personal letter to Prof. Hodell from Mr. R. Barrett Browning is given, stating that he knows that his father got a "distinguished mathematician to make the necessary calculation" to find out about the moonlight on a certain night, evidently referring to the occasion on which Pompilia escaped with Caponsacchi.

[2] *The Atlantic Monthly*, Mch., 1908, p. 410.

[3] Hodell, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Mch., 1908, pp. 410, 411. Cf. *The Old Yellow Book*, pp. 249–255, for a more detailed discussion of Browning's choice of literary form.

April 23, in the preceding week, and, of course, changing accordingly the other dates which this carries with it.[1] This was done, no doubt, for artistic reasons, *i.e.* to make the flight begin on St. George's day, consistently with the use of St. George slaying the dragon, — a figure caught from the painting by Vasari which is the altar-piece in Caponsacchi's Church in Arezzo, and a figure on which Browning plays so often throughout the poem.[2] Another striking instance is this:[3] In so important a matter as the place where Pompilia dies, Browning has taken the responsibility upon himself. He presents her as dying in the hospital of Santa Anna,[4] probably getting his suggestion from the phrase "of Santa Anna" connected with Fra Celestino's name. His letter is signed: "Fra Celestino Angelo di S. Anna." Pompilia died in her own house.[5] There was no hospital of Santa Anna. Prof. Griffin also noticed the same thing and calls Browning's hospital "wholly imaginary."[6]

2. *Browning's contribution.*

But with all Browning's faithfulness to the facts as he found them, his poem is, even in essence, a far different thing from the old yellow book. He has made the facts live. He says:

"Let this old woe step on the stage again."[7]

[1] See Hodell, p. 256; p. 297, note 28; p. 310, note 184.

[2] P. 657, ll. 7–12; p. 766, ll. 40–43; p. 775, ll. 4–16; p. 795, ll. 60–65; p. 829, ll. 2–8.

[3] Hodell, p. 321, note 351. In this note, Hodell is mistaken in supposing that the line "In the good house that helps the poor to die" (p. 663, l. 14) means the Convent of the Convertites. It means the hospital. Browning is consistent.

[4] P. 663, ll. 5–33; p. 686, ll. 1–40; cf. the whole atmosphere of Pompilia's own monologue. The name of the hospital is given in p. 686, l. 3.

[5] Hodell, p. 297, note 24; p. 321, note 351.

[6] In a note to his translation of the account of the murder discovered in the Casanatense Library, Griffin and Minchin, *Life of Browning*, p. 321.

[7] P. 660, l. 4.

And Browning has elevated, transmuted, transfigured the whole story. His originality is plain to the student in two general directions, — viz. (1) the freedom he has used in the preparation of the monologues and (2) his elaboration of the characters.

The monologues in their present form are, of course, Browning's work. Some of them, *e.g.* Half-Rome, The Other Half-Rome, and the Pope's soliloquy, are made "out of whole cloth" and have no counterpart in the old yellow book. Others, such as Caponsacchi's and Pompilia's, have gathered from the book and from Browning's free invention. Still others, such as the pleas of the lawyers Arcangeli and Bottini, are dependent on the book to a remarkable degree, yet the matter used has been completely worked over and rewoven into a new tissue.

In the elaboration of the characters, Browning has infused more of his own soul than in anything else. Hodell in both his articles gives considerable space[1] to a comparison of the characters as set forth by Browning and by the old yellow book.

Count Guido in Browning's poem is essentially the real Guido of the historical case, — a compound of cunning, greed, and brutality. Yet, starting with such excellent material for a villain, Browning has sublimated Guido's subtlety and cruelty and conceit and self-sophistication. There is infused into him much of Browning's knowledge of the darkest recesses of human nature.

In the character of Caponsacchi, Browning's creative power has worked much more freely, until in Browning's heroic and chivalrous young priest we hardly recognize the Canon Caponsacchi of the old yellow book. His

[1] Hodell, *The Old Yellow Book*, pp. 274–290; *The Atlantic Monthly*, Mch., 1908, pp. 411–413.

affidavit when he had been placed on trial for elopement is included in the book and shows him to be a resolute man; and when overtaken with Pompilia at Castelnuovo he had faced Guido with ringing words and so bold a front that the husband had quailed. But all the delicacy of feeling, heat of indignation, sublimity of moral ideals, and depth of religious insight which complete the character of Browning's Caponsacchi are borrowed from the personality of Robert Browning.

Of Pompilia, Browning is said to have remarked: "She is just as I found her in the book." But the creative power of his genius has worked almost as extensively on her as on Caponsacchi. True, the suggestion for the Pompilia of *The Ring and the Book* is found in the letter of Brother Celestino, who confessed her on her death-bed, and in the accompanying affidavits of ten other eye-witnesses. But elsewhere in the evidence and arguments in the old yellow book, she is either vilified by the defenders of her husband or spoken of patronizingly and pityingly as "poor child" by those who were on her side. But Browning has made Pompilia his ideal of womanhood and motherhood, — his highest embodiment of patience, courage, and faith. It is very easy to see that he has read into her much of his idealized thought of his own wife: *i.e.* starting with the best in the sources, he has, perhaps not realizing how thoroughly, re-created Pompilia in the image of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

The greatest and most significant addition which Browning has introduced into the characters of Caponsacchi and Pompilia is their love for each other, which becomes in the poem such a tremendous dynamic and yet is so controlled. This infusion, into the story, of a splendid passion is the highest humanizing touch Browning has given in making the story live again.

The clue to Browning's elaboration of the characters, the incentive which led him on, was the *search for adequate motives*. Beyond the conflicting motives alleged in the old yellow book, Browning went into a psychological study of the materials, to form a conception of adequate motives in Guido, Caponsacchi, and Pompilia to account for the facts lying in such a mass in the legal documents. Working with a wonderful sincerity and desire to be true to the facts, and yet with an insight into human nature and a passionate sympathy with human nature which he could not violate, Browning has reanimated the facts in the midst of a pulsating tide of human life.

The title *The Ring and the Book* is unfortunate and gives no idea of the contents of the poem. It is caught simply from a simile,[1] that just as a goldsmith mingles with pure gold an alloy to make it hard enough to bear the tools and be shaped into a ring and engraved or embossed, so Browning mixes with the crude facts found in the old yellow book his own imagination and shapes the whole mass into this poem. It would have been much better, if he had chosen a title somehow related to the story itself.

What Browning has accomplished cannot be summed up in more appropriate words than those of Hodell:

> "Marshaling the material of the book into an entirely new order, he interpenetrated it with what lay wisest and deepest in his own nature, creating therefrom the most human and most significant longer poem of the nineteenth century."[2]

[1] This is the simile elaborated throughout Bk. I, in discussing the artist's relation to his raw material. It is caught up again at the very end of Bk. XII.

[2] Hodell, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Mch., 1908, p. 413.

III. The Plot in Browning's Poem

It will be well to get the story before us as it stands in Browning's poem. But it stands there told from many points of view. The various presentations of the story, however, range themselves in two antagonistic lines, viz. those favoring Count Guido Franceschini and those favoring Pompilia and Caponsacchi. These two views part company often in their statement of facts, and as often in their interpretation of facts stated alike by both sides.[1] We must tell the story according to one side or the other — we cannot tell it from both sides at the same time. Accordingly the story is outlined here from the standpoint of Pompilia and Caponsacchi. You should bear in mind how differently many of these things are presented by Guido and those who favor him.

The story is as tangled as a modern novel.

There was, in the city of Arezzo in Tuscany, a family

[1] There is a large number of instances of the same fact's being presented with interpretations diametrically opposite. Two examples:

(1) Pompilia's seizing Guido's sword to attack him at Castelnuovo:

(*a*) Interpreted by Half-Rome in the vein of ridicule and the mock-heroic (p. 679, ll. 15–34); jocosely treated by Bottini (p. 832, ll. 36–73); interpreted by Guido as an indication of her brazen impudence (p. 740, ll. 58–75).

(*b*) Interpreted by Caponsacchi as utmost nobility of soul (p. 772, ll. 3–21, 69–75); by Pompilia as desperate courage born of utter truth (p. 709, ll. 4–74); by the Pope as obedience to the highest instincts (p. 853, ll. 17–47).

(2) Guido's use of Caponsacchi's name at the Comparini's door:

(*a*) Interpreted by Half-Rome as a generous act, the final test which proved Pompilia's guilt (p. 683, l. 57–p. 684, l. 19); and by Count Guido in the same way (p. 747, ll. 9–32).

(*b*) Interpreted by The Other Half-Rome as having conclusively proved Pompilia's innocence (p. 704, l. 68–p. 705, l. 19); and by Pompilia as basest deception and treachery (p. 779, l. 76–p. 780, l. 4; p. 782, ll. 31, 32; p. 801, ll. 67–75); and felt by Browning to be a regular satanic trick (p. 654, ll. 57–67; p. 657, ll. 27–51).

named Franceschini, having three sons and several daughters, — an ancient but impoverished house. Two sons, Paul and Girolamo, became priests. But the eldest son, Guido, became attached to a cardinal's suite in Rome and took only minor orders in the Church, — orders which would permit him to marry. He did not become a priest, his duty being, as the eldest son, to marry and continue the family line. He failed in his efforts for preferment and was 46 years of age when he decided to give it up and marry and return to the family palace in Arezzo. His brother Paul helped him to find a wife.

Now, there was in Rome a family named Comparini, of the middle class, having certain property so entailed that they could not use it up, but it would go to their daughter and her children. The father was Pietro, the mother Violante, and the daughter Pompilia. Moreover, they had social ambitions for their daughter — this was especially true of the mother. And finally, without the father's consent, Pompilia was, through her mother's scheming, married to Count Guido Franceschini. When Pietro found it out, he stormed, but presently decided that there was nothing to do but to make the best of it; and finally he and his wife went to live with their daughter and Count Guido in Tuscany.

But Guido turned out to be a tyrant and worse, and made life so disagreeable for Pietro and Violante that they fled and returned to Rome. Then, to spite Guido, they went before a court and declared that Pompilia was not their child at all, but an illegitimate child whom Violante had received from her dying mother. Violante had beforehand secretly made arrangements to receive this child, had told Pietro that he might expect a child of his own begetting, and had actually palmed off this child on her husband as

her own.[1] Violante had kept the secret so well that Pietro himself never knew the truth about it until now when Violante told him and they made it public before the court and instituted a suit for the recovery of the dowry. They did not see that this declaration was the very worst thing they could do for Pompilia. She was in no way responsible for her origin. Left alone in Count Guido's palace, he turned against her with hate and loathing, and subjected her to all torture of soul as well as violence of body. His relatives in the house combined with him in persecuting his wife. For some of this, such as the doings of his brother Girolamo, Guido was probably not responsible, but his own purposed cruelty was ingenious and constant. Pompilia appealed to the Governor and to the Archbishop, but neither of them would do anything to help her because of Guido's high position. She made several other efforts to secure assistance, but they were of no avail.

Now there was also in Arezzo a young priest, Giuseppe Caponsacchi, Canon of the Church of Santa Maria della Pieve, — also of noble birth. Guido plotted to bring his

[1] That Violante could practice such a deception successfully seems at first thought almost incredible. But the fact is that such cases are not very unusual. This statement is made on such high authority as that of the Rev. Dr. Hastings H. Hart. Dr. Hart was for ten years Superintendent of the Illinois Children's Home and Aid Society, Chicago, and is now Director of the Department of Child-Helping of the Russell Sage Foundation, New York. He has thus had unusual opportunities for information in such matters. When he was in Oberlin in March, 1908, to deliver a lecture, he told Pres. King of several such cases: one in Chicago of which he knew personally — the husband believed it was his wife's own child but the woman's deception was accidentally discovered and she was compelled by Dr. Hart to acknowledge it; another case related to him by a physician; and another, not in Chicago, given him by good authority — this case being that of a woman who deceived her husband in this way three times within a few years. Dr. Hart has given me the same facts in a letter. The names of Pres. King and Dr. Hart are used in this connection with their permission.

wife and this young priest together ever after these two had noticed each other once in a theatre. Guido's idea evidently was to use Caponsacchi as a means of torturing Pompilia, and to make out such a case against her that he might bring against her an accusation of adultery. He had married her only for money, and he thought that, if he could bring against her a well-supported charge of adultery, he could get legal separation from her and still legally hold her property. Guido sent the priest letters of love purporting to be from Pompilia — who could neither read nor write, as was undoubtedly the case with the majority of women in Italy two hundred years ago[1] — and the letters which Caponsacchi sent back declining the overtures were never read to Pompilia, but in their place fervent love-letters written by Guido but purporting to come from the priest. Guido's agent in carrying this on was a waiting-maid named Margherita.

This thing went on for some time, till somehow Caponsacchi did decide to come to Pompilia's window. To his surprise he found her there, not Count Guido as he had expected. She told him her straits, and after much hesitation he arranged to take her away. They started before daybreak and drove all that day and the following night and the second day, and reached Castelnuovo, fifteen miles from Rome. There she fainted away and had to be left in the inn. There they were overtaken by Count Guido, and were presently brought before the Roman court. The judges, of course, thought it was only a young priest's

[1] As late as 1901, 60.8 % of the female population of Italy were illiterate. See *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th ed., 1911, vol. XV, p. 16, in the article *Italy*. In the old yellow book, Guido's lawyers insist that Pompilia did know how to write. She may have learned during her bitter experience in Arezzo. See Hodell, p. 313, note 235; p. 314, notes 247–249, 251.

escapade, this running away with another man's wife, and treated the matter as a good deal of a joke. But they must do something to satisfy Count Guido and uphold the dignity of the law. So they imposed a light sentence on each. Pompilia was sent to a convent of penitents in Rome,[1] and after some months was transferred to the home of her foster-parents, where she was under bond to stay as a prisoner. Caponsacchi was relegated to Civita Vecchia, where he was not a prisoner but a sort of exile detained within the limits of that town. Count Guido went home to Arezzo.

So things stood till a week before Christmas, *i.e.* eight months after the flight. Then Pompilia's child was born. The child was a boy and was christened Gaetano, and was then taken away and hidden with his nurse in some place in the country, for fear some harm might come to him from Count Guido. The birth of this child could, of course, bear two interpretations, and Guido at once put the worst interpretation possible upon it. He summoned four men from his country estate and proceeded with them to Rome. They came on the evening of the second day of January, 1698, to the villa where Pompilia was living with Pietro and Violante. Guido knocked on the door, and in reply to a voice within asking "Who is there?" he answered "Caponsacchi." When the door was opened, Guido and

[1] As a matter of fact, the nunnery to which Pompilia was sent was the one commonly called the *Scalette*, in the Via della Lungara. Browning (*e.g.* p. 681, ll. 14–21, 48–51; p. 721, ll. 77–79) has confused this institution with the Convent of St. Mary Magdalene of the Convertites in the Corso, which brought suit in Jan., 1698, for Pompilia's estate. But the suit of this latter convent was not at all based on her having been in their house, but on the privilege granted to them by Pope Leo X at the founding of their house in 1520, — the privilege of having, within limitations, the property of any woman of unchaste life dying in Rome. See Hodell, p. 316, note 276; p. 323, note 364. Their petition in the case of Pompilia was refused.

some of his men rushed in and killed Pietro and Violante and wounded Pompilia so that she died in the hospital,[1] but lived four days — miraculously long it was thought by those whose sympathies were on her side. Officers of the law pursued Count Guido and his four accomplices and arrested them and brought them back to Rome and placed them on trial. All these speeches which Browning has given us are made in connection with *this trial*. Notice that there were *two* trials of importance, besides minor lawsuits. One important trial is that in which Caponsacchi and Pompilia were tried for elopement and received the light sentence of which I have already spoken. That trial is referred to only incidentally in these speeches. The other trial of importance is the trial of Count Guido and his accomplices for murder, at which trial Caponsacchi is only a witness, to tell what he may know as to why there should be any such murder. This is the trial in connection with which Browning presents the monologues in *The Ring and the Book*. If you will only remember this fact of the two trials, you will avoid confusion.

The court found Count Guido and his accomplices guilty and sentenced them to death. Guido appealed to the Pope, as he had a right to do, having taken minor orders in the Church. The Pope confirmed the verdict of the court, and the criminals were executed on the following day, Feb. 22, 1698. Count Guido, because of his rank, was beheaded and his accomplices were hanged.

Already within a month after Pompilia's death, the Convent of St. Mary Magdalene of the Convertites had brought

[1] This is stated, of course, according to the story as presented in *The Ring and the Book*. The fact is, as we have already pointed out, that in having Pompilia die in the hospital of Santa Anna, Browning invents the hospital.

suit claiming her property on the ground that she had been guilty of adultery and that this convent had been granted the privilege of having the property of such women dying in Rome. But in September of the same year, the court rendered its decree, refusing to grant this petition and officially clearing Pompilia's reputation and restoring her good name.

IV. Something of the Setting of the Story

1. The Italy is the Italy of something over two hundred years ago. Modern united Italy, of course, dates from 1870. Italy in 1698 was a country broken up into separate states, quite independent of one another and much given to war with one another. Some like Venice and Genoa were republics. Modena and Parma were each under a duke. Tuscany had its grand duke. Spanish influence was strong in many parts of the country, and Lombardy and the kingdom of Naples were entirely under Spanish rule.[1] A wide irregular strip running northeast diagonally across central Italy was papal territory: *i.e.* this was in the days of the temporal power of the Church, and the Pope was king of central Italy. This disintegrated condition of Italy explains why Guido and Caponsacchi are called "aliens" in Rome.[2] They were aliens there; they were subjects of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and were aliens in Rome almost as much as if they had been Frenchmen or Germans.

2. The Pope to whom the case was appealed was Antonio Pignatelli[3] of Naples, who became Pope Innocent XII in 1691 and died in the year 1700. His tomb is in St. Peter's on the right aisle just before you reach the chapel

[1] A few years later (Peace of Utrecht, 1713), these passed to Austria.

[2] *e.g.* p. 772, ll. 42, 43.

[3] Browning sometimes refers to the Pope by this name, *e.g.* p. 653, l. 40 p. 845, ll. 13, 14; but more often by his official name.

of the Blessed Sacrament. Browning has much idealized him, and has combined with his character the character of Innocent XI [1] (Pope 1676–1689).

3. Central Italy being papal territory, religious and civil government coincide to a large extent, and all the judges in the court are high ecclesiastics. This it is well to remember in order to understand the way the court is sometimes addressed; *e.g.* Guido says:

> "should it please the reverend Court," [2]

and Caponsacchi says:

> "Yes, I am one of your body and a priest." [3]

4. The Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina was Pompilia's church. Here she was baptized, here she was married, and here she was buried. There are several churches of San Lorenzo (St. Lawrence) in Rome, and some phrase is added to distinguish them. San Lorenzo in Lucina is in the little square of San Lorenzo opening off the Corso. The church is just as Browning describes it, except that he has misinterpreted one feature. He makes Pompilia speak of "the marble lion" —

> "With half his body rushing from the wall,
> Eating the figure of a prostrate man —
> (To the right, it is, of entry by the door)." [4]

As a matter of fact, there are two of these lions, one on each side of the door. They are much worn away and belong to the oldest part of the church. It is now understood that, in each case, the lion is *guarding* a man, symboliz-

[1] See Cooke, *Browning Guide-Book*, Boston, 1893, pp. 338, 339; but cf. Hodell, p. 270 and p. 300, note 62. Hodell does not believe that the characteristics added are from Pope Innocent XI.

[2] P. 726, l. 74; cf. p. 727, l. 80–p. 728, l. 1.

[3] P. 755, l. 24.

[4] P. 779, ll. 39–45.

ing the Church's guarding power.[1] It is interesting to note that there is a letter in existence in the postscript to which Browning asks a friend to send him all details about this church.[2] So Browning's description of things connected with this church is at second hand.

5. Arezzo, the native town of Count Guido and of Caponsacchi, is a city of 16,000 inhabitants, in Tuscany, 142 miles from Rome and 54 miles from Florence by the railroad. It is beautifully situated among the hills. It has well preserved walls and narrow streets. It is the ancient Arretium, and its inhabitants are called Aretines.[3] The town figures in history from about 300 B.C. There are many valuable associations connected with the place besides the interest which attaches to *The Ring and the Book*. This was the birthplace of Mæcenas the friend and patron of Virgil and Horace. Here the house where Petrarch was born in 1304 has a large brass tablet on its front. This was the native town of Vasari, the great architect and painter and writer of a history of painting. Some of his best work is here. The square is called the Piazza Vasari, and on the north side of it is the colonnade (more accurately called the *loggia*) built by him in 1573. The old Church of San Francesco has rare frescoes which were in process of restoration when I was there.

6. Browning's references to things in Arezzo are made with great accuracy.

a. The Church of Santa Maria della Pieve, of which Caponsacchi was Canon, stands in the Corso Vittorio

[1] This explanation of the significance of these figures I owe to Prof. Charles B. Wright, who gave it to me in conversation.

[2] The letter was written to Frederic Leighton, Oct. 17, 1864. This postscript is printed in Mrs. Orr's *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, 1 vol. ed., London, 1891, p. 284; new ed., Boston, 1908, p. 273.

[3] Often spoken of so in Browning's poem: *e.g.* p. 659, l. 41; p. 755, l. 54.

Emanuele, and the street is so narrow that it is impossible to take a photograph of the whole church. But the front can be taken from the Corso and the back from the Piazza Vasari. The church occupies the site of a church dating from the beginning of the eleventh century, but much of the present building dates from 1216. The interior was well restored in 1863–65. There is a fine campanile, or bell-tower, five stories high. But the church is best known for its façade, consisting of three colonnades, one above the other, containing all together 58 carved columns. Caponsacchi refers to this:

> "I' the grey of dawn it was I found myself
> Facing the pillared front o' the Pieve — mine,
> My church." [1]

The church has a very pleasing interior. Vasari's picture of St. George slaying the dragon is over the altar.

b. The Duomo, or Cathedral, is a good example of Italian Gothic, but its exterior is rather plain and uninteresting. It was begun in the year 1277, and the interior was not completed until 1511. The façade was begun in 1880, and is not yet finished. The Cathedral has a fine situation, overlooking the country. In the Cathedral of Arezzo, you will still see the ancient custom of having one big book on a stand in the middle of the choir, while all the clergy stand around it and sing the vespers from the same book. The finest thing about the Cathedral is its long narrow windows, rich with stained glass. Caponsacchi says:

> "'Tis more amusing to go pace at eve
> I' the Duomo, — watch the day's last gleam outside
> Turn, as into a skirt of God's own robe,
> Those lancet-windows' jewelled miracle." [2]

[1] P. 764, ll. 65–67.

[2] P. 758, ll. 25–28, — rather extreme language, but the setting sun coming through these windows would probably justify it.

c. San Clemente, the gate through which Pompilia escaped, is at the north of the town:

> "Take San Clemente, there's no other gate
> Unguarded at the hour." [1]

I took a special walk up there to examine it. It is now guarded by a soldier, at least in the daytime. It consists of a very heavy wooden gate, and through this a small gate for foot-passengers, — this small gate being about the size of an ordinary door. It is easy to see how readily one might escape when the large gate was shut, if it was found unguarded. The present gate looks ancient and weather-beaten, but it is not probable that is the same wood which was there two hundred years ago.

d. I could get no trace of a Madonna by Rafael in the Cathedral of Arezzo. Several times Browning refers to a Rafael Madonna on the high altar of this Cathedral.[2] Whether there has been one there and it has been removed, or whether Browning felt at liberty to introduce one for literary purposes, I do not know. But he has been so accurate in all other details that I am inclined to think there may have been a Rafael here which has been taken away.

7. Also I visited Fiesole, on the hills northeast of Florence. Fiesole is the place where the Caponsacchi family originated. Capo-in-Sacco, or Caponsacco, the progenitor of this family, is referred to not alone by Browning,[3] but also by Dante in the sixteenth canto of the *Paradiso* of his *Divine Comedy*.[4]

[1] P. 766, ll. 14, 15.

[2] P. 757, ll. 43–49; p. 761, ll. 32–35; and in several other places in Caponsacchi's speech.

[3] *e.g.* p. 755, ll. 31–41.

[4] "Already had Caponsacco descended into the market place down from Fiesole." — Translation by Charles Eliot Norton, 5th ed., Boston, 1898, p. 108.

XVI

THE RING AND THE BOOK (CONCLUDED)

CONTINUING our study of *The Ring and the Book*, we turn now to

V. AN EXAMINATION OF BROWNING'S POEM

The Ring and the Book was published in four volumes, one month apart, — Nov., 1868; Dec., 1868; Jan., 1869; and Feb., 1869.[1] Browning was then 56 years of age. Mrs. Browning had been dead seven years when the poem appeared, though parts of it began to be written within three or four years of her death. It is to her that the invocation is addressed; *i.e.*, instead of invoking any of the muses, Browning addresses to the soul of Mrs. Browning an exquisite invocation:[2]

> "O lyric Love, half angel and half bird
> And all a wonder and a wild desire, —
> Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!"

And he begs

> "That still, despite the distance and the dark,"

there may be

> "some interchange
> Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
> Some benediction anciently thy smile."

[1] The Boston Public Library has the four volumes of this first edition. Prof. Louis F. Miskovsky of Oberlin College has a set in very fine condition, which he kindly loaned me several times.

[2] P. 666, l. 66–p. 667, l. 11. The words quoted above are from p. 666, ll. 66, 67, 77; p. 667, ll. 1–4. One of my friends has suggested that the use of the word "anciently" is peculiarly significant, — "anciently" because it has seemed so long to Browning since his wife died.

As we have already noted, in our discussion of Browning's treatment of his sources, it is easy to see many characteristics of Mrs. Browning in his conception of the character and appearance of Pompilia.

The Ring and the Book is the supreme work of Browning's mature genius, and it exhibits well his excellences and his defects.

1. *Browning's Defects Plain in the Poem.*

Of the unfortunate features of Browning's writings, we have already spoken in the introduction to these studies. It is not necessary to go over that ground again at this time. It is enough to say that all those features are found in abundance in *The Ring and the Book*. The poem is packed with Browning's vast knowledge from beginning to end, much of it cropping out in obscure allusions and reminiscences; to read the poem understandingly is a sort of university education. The tendency to go on and on is given free rein, resulting in a work of forbidding length. The play of intellectual cleverness is freely indulged, and in this Browning is a past-master. The temptation to go into the by-ways of philosophic arguing is not sufficiently resisted. The revelling in Latin and Italian is unrestrained; it should be said, however, that this is justifiable, if not absolutely necessary, when we consider the subject and the atmosphere. Frequently the sentences are very long and the imagery elaborate. The poem affords a host of illustrations of the fact that Browning cannot easily let go of a figure of speech when he has once taken hold of it. He can say as much in a few words as any man that ever wrote. He can draw a picture with as few strokes as any man that ever drew; as *e.g.* when he speaks of "the sudden bloody splendour poured" over the inn at Castelnuovo,[1] or of

[1] P. 656, ll. 22–24.

Pompilia's gliding into the carriage outside the gate of Arezzo:

"so a cloud
Gathers the moon up." [1]

But often in handling a figure of speech he meanders on and on, with many intricacies of phrase. It is noticeable that, when he comes to the more passionate and emotional parts, where he himself is deeply moved, then his style is simple and direct.

2. *Excellence of Browning's Plan.*

Yet in spite of all the defects which any of the critics may charge up against it, *The Ring and the Book* is a great and wonderful work. It is so vast and so various that, as was well said many years ago,[2] it seems as if it could hardly be the work of one man. It frequently impresses you as if it were the composite work of many great minds. It has been fitly compared to a great Gothic cathedral.[2]

And it does hold the reader's attention, and this is no small feat when the proposition is to hear the same story told ten or a dozen times. Browning throws away all the arts of the story-teller. He does not reserve anything to stimulate the reader's interest. He tells at the beginning what the plot all is. He tells the story two or three times in that opening book, tells what he is going to do, under what circumstances each character is going to speak, what point of view each is going to have, even how they are going to act. He leaves nothing to be expected. But the incidents in the story are many of them capable of such different interpretations that you are eager to see how it looks from different points of view.

[1] P. 767, ll. 1, 2.

[2] By James Thomson, in an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. CCLI, pp. 682–695, Dec., 1881.

Moreover, the art in the arrangement is good, and we appreciate the intenser parts as we could not except for the approach to them by which Browning leads us. He comes from the circumference to the centre, — first smoke and then flame, as he says.[1] We hear, first, gossip: of course, such a tragedy, involving a man of high rank like Count Guido, would set all Rome to talking. So we hear "Half-Rome" speaking, *i.e.* a man who represents that part of the populace who are partial to Count Guido and justify him for killing an adulterous wife; then "The Other Half-Rome" defending Pompilia and believing her to be pure and a martyr and Count Guido a monster; then "Tertium Quid" (*a third something*), a superior individual who claims that he is impartial, tries to be on both sides of the fence at once, and naturally arrives at no result. Then we hear Count Guido speaking for himself after torture; then Caponsacchi testifying before the judges; then Pompilia speaking from her cot in the hospital; then the principal lawyers, Arcangeli and Bottini, each one in process of getting up his plea and each esteeming this great case an opportunity to make professional reputation and to discomfit his opponent; then the Pope meditating by himself over "these dismalest of documents," as he calls them,[2] — the very papers which we handle in the old yellow book; then Guido again, a condemned man, waiting for his execution, talking to his confessors in his cell with quite another tone from that with which he spoke in the court, now begging and pleading for life, calling on every power that he thinks can help him, even his murdered wife:

> "Abate, — Cardinal, — Christ, — Maria, — God, . . .
> Pompilia, will you let them murder me?"[3]

[1] P. 661, ll. 41–45. [2] P. 843, l. 14. [3] P. 896, ll. 17, 18.

This is a great stroke of art, to make Guido in his despair call for help on the wife whom he had persecuted and murdered. Then we have letters, fragments of speeches, and so on, telling of the execution, giving us echoes of the tragedy, growing fainter as interest in the events and memory of them slowly fades away. You see the whole thing is very like human life, like the way of the world. It is a masterly arrangement.

3. *Browning's Imagination.*

And I don't think we have given Browning credit for his magnificent imagination. To make all this live is no small task. And usually the atmosphere is exceedingly well preserved. The light gossipy tone of the first three speakers, yet each with a tone quite different from the others, is very consistent; and incidentally things are thrown in unobtrusively which show us exactly where and under what conditions each is speaking.[1] When Count Guido speaks before the court, he two or three times refers to the pain in his shoulder,[2] but even when he does not directly refer to it, we have the feeling that this man has been injured on the rack. In Caponsacchi's speech you are always conscious that it is a priest speaking. This is well sustained in the earlier part of the speech by references[3] to his study of the *Summa Theologiæ* (Sum, or Principal Matter, of

[1] In Bk. I, when Browning explains his plan (p. 660, l. 18–p. 666, l. 22), he tells pretty carefully the circumstances under which each character will speak. The remark above in the lecture refers to indications woven into each speaker's own monologue.

[2] P. 727, ll. 2, 3; p. 728, ll. 22–26; p. 747, l. 74–p. 748, l. 2. The first few minutes of Guido's speech (p. 726, l. 74–p. 728, l. 26) have many references to the torture he has endured, and some marks of pain besides those just given; see *e.g.* p. 726, ll. 82, 83. Cf. other indications of injuries, p. 744, ll. 1, 2; p. 751, ll. 80, 81; p. 752, ll. 40–45. This last shows that his hand has been hurt in the torture.

[3] P. 758, ll. 49, 50, 66; p. 765, ll. 33, 34.

Theology) of St. Thomas Aquinas, which was and is still the standard authority on theology in the Roman Catholic Church. In only one instance are there any grounds for saying that Browning has failed to create and keep an atmosphere consistent with the situation, and that is in the case of the Pope. Of course, the Pope falls to meditating on the larger aspect of things as suggested by this crime, and into the mouth of this aged Pope 200 years ago Browning has put a large amount of latter half of the nineteenth century philosophizing. But it should be remembered that the great questions of life are the same in every generation, and that a Pope such as Browning has conceived Innocent XII would very naturally fall into some such meditations as these. It may be that the thoughts are shaped and colored by too modern a spirit, but the problems discussed are not peculiar to the nineteenth century. At least it should not be too hastily argued that in the Pope's monologue Browning has failed to "sense the situation" and has in this one case fallen below the achievement of a real and consistent atmosphere.

4. *Browning's Psychological Acuteness.*

And for subtle understanding of human nature in its depth and height and length and breadth, we have no equal to Browning in English, unless it is the great Shakespeare. And it seems to me that Browning often handles human nature with more discernment and delicacy than Shakespeare himself.

Browning is so subtle that many miss the point. This matter between Caponsacchi and Pompilia would be only grossly interpreted now, as such things have always been. It is perfectly evident that, according to Browning's idea of it, there was no one in the wide world to Pompilia like Caponsacchi, no one in the wide world to him like that

woman. Yet there was no sin between these two. Caponsacchi dared not move in the matter until he had conquered himself. However passionately he loved her, he held himself in control. He did not believe in "the divine right of passion," as Richard Wagner did.

> "I never touched her with my finger-tip
> Except to carry her to the couch that eve,
> Against my heart, beneath my head bowed low,
> As we priests carry the paten." [1]

There was no surrender to passion. And yet those two loved each other with such a love that, if love can save a soul, such souls as theirs are in the heaven of heavens.[2]

Let us examine, just as an illustration of the best in *The Ring and the Book*, Caponsacchi's own account of himself. Let me call attention to Browning's knowledge of subtle psychological principles as shown in that single speech.

a. Caponsacchi was a light and frivolous priest. He admits it. He took his vows under an easy interpretation of them,[3] and spent his time between the duties and offices of the Church on the one hand and, on the other hand, dancing attendance upon ladies and making himself generally popular and seeking preferment.[4]

b. But at once when Pompilia came into his life, everything was changed. The making of light poems seemed a foolish occupation.[5] The Church suddenly came to have

[1] Caponsacchi, p. 773, ll. 9–12.

[2] This refers, of course, to Caponsacchi and Pompilia as pictured in Browning's poem, not as they stand in the old yellow book and other sources. I find I have swung into the phrase used of Héloïse by Thomas Davidson in his article on Abélard in *Lib. of World's Best Lit.*, vol. I, p. 24.

[3] P. 755, l. 71–p. 756, l. 62.

[4] P. 756, l. 62–p. 757, l. 35.

[5] P. 758, ll. 18–33.

new meaning.[1] Life looked all different.[2] Even before he had ever spoken to her, he was a changed man. This stirring of a man's whole nature under such circumstances is exactly true to life.

c. By a keen insight Caponsacchi knew that the letters which were brought to him were not Pompilia's work but Guido's,[3] and egged him on and played with him by dropping now and then a half-committal word in his replies.[4] The temptation to do this, and to bring Guido to a "thrashing" at last,[5] is entirely true to human nature.

d. The struggle which Caponsacchi went through before he decided to take Pompilia away is a great study in the development of a soul. He was staking everything and would lose everything. He knew that no one would give him credit for right motives in running away with Count Guido's wife. His whole future was at stake. Yet here was the service of God, and he knew he could never have any respect for himself before God if he failed to help this woman in her need:

> "how true,
> I am a priest! I see the function here."[6]

This moral struggle through which he passed between the time when she first spoke to him and the hour when they fled is something great. He actually persuaded himself *not to do it;* he thought he had decided that he would not help her escape.[7] He honestly went to her window the

[1] P. 758, ll. 30–40. See how this grew upon him as things went on, p. 764, l. 65–p. 765, l. 29.
[2] P. 758, ll. 18–68.
[3] P. 759, l. 17–p. 760, l. 25.
[4] P. 759, ll. 20, 21; p. 760, ll. 9–11. Cf. p. 759, ll. 72, 73.
[5] P. 760, ll. 59–66; p. 761, ll. 11–28.
[6] P. 765, ll. 25, 26; cf. ll. 37, 38; also the whole passage, ll. 18–56.
[7] P. 765, ll. 30–62.

second time to comfort her and advise her not to despair.[1] But when she appealed to him again, threw herself on his help in her desperate straits,[2] all he had decided to do and say went to the winds. He recognized here the challenge of duty, — a challenge which could not be refused without making him a coward before God, and he told her how to meet him and escape.[3] How true to psychology is every step of this process, and most true the reversal of his decision at the end, — especially true because, against his feelings, his judgment had compelled him to make that decision.

e. Many indications of the struggle are graphically given: *e.g.*

(1) Before Pompilia has spoken to him, Caponsacchi sits thinking how his life has shaken under him, and keenly he realizes the gulf between aspiration and actual achievement in human life, as he had not realized it before.[4]

(2) He tries to read Aquinas' *Summa Theologiæ*, but her smile keeps glowing out of its pages.[5]

(3) Later he tries again to tie down his attention to this book, and finds he can see only her name across the theological page.[6]

(4) Nothing could tell more vividly of his struggle than his pacing the city all night after their first interview, unable to think connectedly on this matter but knowing that he is at a crisis and is passing into a different state never to be

[1] P. 765, ll. 63–70.

[2] P. 765, l. 71–p. 766, l. 5.

[3] P. 766, ll. 6–16. The fact that Caponsacchi answers so readily with a plan of escape does not argue against the statement that he had decided not to help Pompilia. Of course, he had thought about what plan might be best if one were to help her, and hence the details were ready in his mind.

[4] P. 758, ll. 40–56; see also ll. 57–65.

[5] P. 758, ll. 66–68.

[6] P. 765, ll. 33, 34.

the same man he was;[1] finding himself "i' the grey of dawn" facing his own church, with a painful realization of how it has "changed tone" as it speaks to him now;[2] and next day sitting dazed in his room and letting time run over him.[3]

f. Again, Browning's knowledge of psychological states and processes is shown to great advantage in connection with the flight. Notice some of the details:

(1) When the flight has been decided upon, Caponsacchi is so startled next morning by his servant's innocent remark about something he should remember for evening:

> "'Sir, this eve —
> Do you forget?' I started. 'How forget?
> What is it you know?'"[4]

(2) Note the sharp contrast between this throbbing undertaking of which Caponsacchi's mind is full and the perfunctory services of the Church of which the servant reminds him with such seriousness.[5]

(3) See Browning's understanding of how the usual routine of the day gives way before a greater purpose which makes the day full of meaning and to be remembered; the accustomed routine seems insignificant.[6] We have all experienced this to some extent.

(4) Notice the description of the strain under which Caponsacchi was at the hour of the escape:

> "With a tune in the ears, low leading up to loud,
> A light in the eyes, faint that would soon be flare."[7]

(5) Very subtle and entirely scientific is the fact that he imagined Pompilia coming to the carriage in white when

[1] P. 764, ll. 28–64. [2] P. 764, l. 65–p. 765, l. 17. [3] P. 765, ll. 30–35.
[4] P. 766, ll. 38–40. [5] P. 766, ll. 40–53. [6] P. 766, ll. 53–59.
[7] P. 766, ll. 60–66.

she actually appeared in black.[1] You see, she had worn white whenever he had seen her before, and he always thought of her in white. Now when she comes in black, he skilfully turns the matter and says the white which he thought he saw coming was her soul shining through her body.

(6) The tension under which he was as the flight began, with the vague effect of the carriage rolling through the darkness and taking him away from his former life, is wonderfully portrayed in the words "the rush and roll of the abyss."[2]

g. After the flight has begun:

(1) Such a change has intervened that at daylight that very morning it seems years since they left Arezzo. Pompilia asks:

> "How long since we both left
> Arezzo?"

and Caponsacchi answers:

> "Years — and certain hours beside."[3]

(2) He does not like it when she asks him what woman he was accustomed to help, because that reminds him too much of his former frivolous life.[4]

(3) He does not like it when she asks him to read the service at the *angelus*.[5] That cuts two ways: it reminds him of his former perfunctory observance of canonical hours, and it also shows him she is thinking of him only as a priest.

(4) But when she calls him "friend," he is so taken up

[1] P. 766, ll. 66–73. The explanation given above I owe to a friend who pointed it out in conversation.

[2] P. 767, l. 28.

[3] P. 767, ll. 60, 61.

[4] P 768, ll. 3–9.

[5] P 768, ll. 41–49.

with that fact that he cannot remember what he replied at that point in the conversation.[1]

(5) A striking insight into human nature is shown in the fact that this man who has mumbled hundreds of prayers says, in an hour of real stress and exceeding need:

> "Why, in my whole life I have never prayed!" [2]

h. And so I could go on step by step through Caponsacchi's speech and point out Browning's psychological acuteness. It is on every page. It comes out strikingly in every phase of the experience at Castelnuovo,[3] where Guido overtook the runaways. It comes out in Caponsacchi's never forgiving himself that he didn't kill Guido when he had the chance,[4] and in his feeling how ridiculous it was for Guido to claim such a woman for his wife.[5] It comes out in Caponsacchi's begging the court to let him see Pompilia again, just as a priest to minister to her as she is dying,[6] and in the reverence for her which his love has given him, — a reverence so great that the chamber where she slept at Castelnuovo was to him a chapel [7] and he carried her thither with all the awe with which a devout believer in transubstantiation carries the paten on which rests the very body of Christ.[8] It comes out marvellously in his understanding that, although the facts related are the same which were told six months ago, the color is changed since this murder:

> "the sky is different,
> Eclipse in the air now." [9]

[1] P. 769, l. 41–p. 770, l. 7. Especially p. 769, l. 41; p. 770, ll. 1–7.
[2] P. 768, l. 74.
[3] P. 770, l. 19–p. 772, l. 60.
[4] P. 771, ll. 22–36; p. 776, ll. 43–52.
[5] P. 771, ll. 37–44.
[6] P. 772, l. 69–p. 773, l. 8.
[7] P. 771, ll. 63, 64.
[8] P. 773, ll. 9–12.
[9] P. 773, ll. 31–40, especially ll. 34–40

The same psychological insight comes out in the end in Caponsacchi's zealous effort to argue that his leaving her for half an hour by a post-house on the road proves that they were not in love,[1] and again in the way he handles his cherished recollections of her brow

> "bent somewhat with an invisible crown
> Of martyr and saint"

her dark eyes, and her lips

> "Careful for a whole world of sin and pain."[2]

i. But I must not pause over these things. There are scores of instances in this one speech. Mention of one more must suffice now. Nothing shows Browning's understanding of human nature better than the last words of Caponsacchi.[3] It is a wonderful device to which Browning has resorted. Caponsacchi has told his story. He persuades the court and himself that it is all over, that he and Pompilia are "mere strangers now," that it was a matter of his profession as a priest, and that he is just like a student who reads in his Plutarch's *Lives of Illustrious Men* and imagines that he would do what they did, then rouses himself to his bare solitary room: even so Caponsacchi claims to pass content from this experience with Pompilia. He has persuaded the court, and has undoubtedly persuaded himself, that this is so. Then suddenly he loses hold of himself and utters one great bitter cry:

> "O great, just, good God! Miserable me!"[4]

Those two words "Miserable me" are more eloquent than all he has said in the last few minutes about the experience's being closed. They show the irreparable desolation of his

[1] P. 777, ll. 45–58; cf. p. 769, ll. 20–32.
[2] P. 777, ll. 63–75.
[3] P. 778, l. 65–p. 779, l. 18.
[4] P. 779, l. 18.

soul. This whole process, with the sudden outbreak at the end — the protest of his heart against his intellect, is entirely in accordance with the facts of psychology.

j. Now, I don't mean to say that any of these instances, or all of them together, prove Browning's knowledge of the technical science of psychology. But they do prove that he studied human nature as keenly as the technical psychologist does, and quite as successfully. Many of these speeches are almost as rich in psychological study as is Caponsacchi's.[1] It will be an inexhaustible source of interest to anyone to look for this element in *The Ring and the Book*. The wonder at Browning's understanding of human nature constantly grows upon me.

5. *The Passion which Browning has Infused.*

And for splendid passion, we have no one superior to Browning in English literature. There is not a weak character in the poem. Good or bad, these characters are every one of them alive to their finger-tips, with "plenty of red corpuscles in their blood." This is why *The Ring and the Book*, while it is so tragic, is never depressing.

6. *The Beauty of the Poem.*

It should be added that the poem has a splendid wealth of color, not only in characters and plot, but in metaphor and simile. It is full of dramatic interest, and abounds in passages of exquisite poetry and word-pictures drawn with rare skill and delicacy. Its lines are often so freighted with great thoughts that they are quite unforgettable. Indeed, it would be hard to call to mind another work in which beauty of thought and beauty of expression are so lavished as in *The Ring and the Book*.

[1] The psychological study in Pompilia's monologue is perhaps keener and more subtle than in Caponsacchi's, and it is all the more remarkable in that it is a man's study of a woman's psychology.

I have time to point out only a few illustrations out of the hundreds equally good.

a. In Bk. I, the introductory book:

(1) How the tragic occurrence had dropped out of all memory until Browning found the old yellow book, — the whole situation pictured in one line:

> "Oblivion gone home with her harvesting." [1]

(2) The singing in San Felice Church in June, recognized year after year, — the vague impression given one outside which would be spoiled by putting in accurate information:

> "Chanting a chant made for midsummer nights —
> I know not what particular praise of God,
> It always came and went with June." [2]

(3) The description of Caponsacchi before the judges:

> "As he speaks rapidly, angrily, speech that smites:
> And they keep silence, bear blow after blow,
> Because the seeming-solitary man,
> Speaking for God, may have an audience too,
> Invisible, no discreet judge provokes." [3]

b. In Guido's speech in his own defense:

(1) His description of the condition to which his wife's behavior had brought him:

> "I, — chin-deep in a marsh of misery,
> Struggling to extricate my name and fame
> And fortune from the marsh would drown them all,
> My face the sole unstrangled part of me, —
> I must have this new gad-fly in that face." [4]

(2) Guido's account of his feelings at that Christmas-time before he killed his wife:

> "Festive bells — everywhere the Feast o' the Babe.
> * * * * * * *

[1] P. 655, l. 2.
[2] P. 655, ll. 66–68.
[3] P. 662, l. 81–p. 663, l. 3.
[4] P. 738, ll. 17–21.

I stopped my ears even to the inner call
Of the dread duty, only heard the song
'Peace upon earth,' saw nothing but the face
O' the Holy Infant and the halo there
Able to cover yet another face
Behind it, Satan's which I else should see.
But, day by day, joy waned and withered off:
The Babe's face, premature with peak and pine,
Sank into wrinkled ruinous old age,
Suffering and death, then mist-like disappeared,
And showed only the Cross at end of all." [1]

c. In Caponsacchi's speech:

(1) Pompilia's likeness to the Madonna of Rafael, — when Caponsacchi first saw her:

"It was as when, in our cathedral once,
As I got yawningly through matin-song,
I saw *facchini* bear a burden up,
Base it on the high-altar, break away
A board or two, and leave the thing inside
Lofty and lone: and lo, when next I looked,
There was the Rafael!" [2]

and again when she was standing at her window:

"the same great, grave, griefful air
As stands i' the dusk, on altar that I know,
Left alone with one moonbeam in her cell,
Our Lady of all the Sorrows." [3]

(2) He urged her to rest at Foligno:

"But her whole face changed,
The misery grew again about her mouth,
The eyes burned up from faintness, like the fawn's
Tired to death in the thicket, when she feels
The probing spear o' the huntsman." [4]

[1] P. 746, ll. 58, 72–78; p. 747, ll. 1–4.
[2] P. 757, ll. 43–49.
[3] P. 761, ll. 32–35.
[4] P. 768, ll. 59–63.

That line,

"The misery grew again about her mouth,"

is a marvel of accurate description. We have all some time noticed this take place in a face, but have never known how to describe it. I don't believe any words can ever tell the story like this line of Browning's.

(3) In one of Caponsacchi's references to Guido, he uses a figure extreme in its audacity. Guido's existence was an insult to God. That there should be any such man was as if someone had spit in God's face. And so Caponsacchi says that, if he had killed Guido at Castelnuovo,

> "There had he lain abolished with his lie,
> Creation purged o' the miscreate, man redeemed,
> A spittle wiped off from the face of God." [1]

d. In Pompilia's monologue:

(1) Her attitude toward Guido:

> "We shall not meet in this world nor the next;
> But where will God be absent? In His face
> Is light, but in His shadow healing too:
> Let Guido touch the shadow and be healed!" [2]

(2) Her attitude toward Caponsacchi, "who," she says, "put his breast between the spears and me":

> "O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,
> No work begun shall ever pause for death!
> Love will be helpful to me more and more
> I' the coming course, the new path I must tread —
> My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that!"

And leaving messages for him, she says:

> "Tell him,
> It was the name of him I sprang to meet
> When came the knock, the summons and the end."

[1] P. 771, ll. 27–29. [2] P. 800, ll. 67–70.

It seemed to her that the knock and that name meant:

"My great heart, my strong hand are back again!"

She says:

"I would have sprung to these, beckoning across
Murder and hell gigantic and distinct
O' the threshold, posted to exclude me heaven:
He is ordained to call and I to come!
Do not the dead wear flowers when dressed for God?
Say, — I am all in flowers from head to foot!
Say, — not one flower of all he said and did,
Might seem to flit unnoticed, fade unknown,
But dropped a seed, has grown a balsam-tree
Whereof the blossoming perfumes the place
At this supreme of moments!"

And her last words are still of him:

"So, let him wait God's instant men call years;
Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out the duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise."[1]

e. In the Pope's soliloquy as he meditates over the case, with the winter in his soul:[2]

(1) He is much touched by Pompilia's character, "perfect in whiteness," in the midst of the world's wickedness:

"Stoop thou down, my child,
Give one good moment to the poor old Pope
Heart-sick at having all his world to blame."[3]

"The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower
She holds up to the softened gaze of God."[4]

[1] P. 801, ll. 41, 47–51, 67, 69–82; p. 802, ll. 17–21. "Lover of my life" means, of course, my life's one lover, my supreme lover.

[2] P. 843, l. 13, "With winter in my soul beyond the world's," *i.e.* beyond the world's winter, the winter outside his window.

[3] P. 852, ll. 39–41.

[4] P. 852, ll. 51, 52.

"Go past me
And get thy praise, — and be not far to seek
Presently when I follow if I may." [1]

(2) The Pope's estimate of Caponsacchi:

"Irregular noble scapegrace." [2]
"All blindness, bravery and obedience! —"

Then correcting himself:

"blind?
Ay, as a man would be inside the sun,
Delirious with the plenitude of light
Should interfuse him to the finger-ends." [3]

That's a great line:

"Delirious with the plenitude of light."

(3) The Pope's basis for optimism:

"I must outlive a thing ere know it dead:
When I outlive the faith there is a sun,
When I lie, ashes to the very soul, —
Some one, not I, must wail above the heap,
'He died in dark whence never morn arose.'
While I see day succeed the deepest night —
How can I speak but as I know? — my speech
Must be, throughout the darkness, 'It will end:
The light that did burn, will burn!'" [4]

(4) One of the greatest things in the whole poem is the Pope's moral courage. As this man, feeble with extreme age and expecting to die any day, sends Count Guido to his death, he does not falter. He declares that, having used the best judgment God has given him, he will not shrink to meet Guido's spirit in the world to come, even if it turns out that Guido is as innocent as a babe. He even says that, believing Guido guilty from the evidence submitted,

[1] P. 853, ll. 45–47.
[2] P. 853, l. 53.
[3] P. 859, ll. 4–7.
[4] P. 859, l. 77–p. 860, l. 3.

he would not dare to die and face God, leaving Guido without suffering the penalty of his crime.

"Therefore there is not any doubt to clear
When I shall write the brief word presently
And chink the hand-bell, which I pause to do.
Irresolute? Not I, more than the mound
With the pine-trees on it yonder! Some surmise,
Perchance, that since man's wit is fallible,
Mine may fail here? Suppose it so, — what then?
Say, — Guido, I count guilty, there's no babe
So guiltless, for I misconceive the man!
If some acuter wit, fresh probing, sound
This multifarious mass of words and deeds
Deeper, and reach through guilt to innocence,
I shall face Guido's ghost nor blench a jot."

And this is what he will say to Guido's ghost:

"God who set me to judge thee meted out
So much of judging faculty, no more:
Ask Him if I was slack in use thereof!" [1]

And continuing his meditation:

"For I am ware it is the seed of act
God holds appraising in His hollow palm.
Therefore I stand on my integrity,
Nor fear at all." [2]

"But say . . . I forthwith
Acknowledge a prompt summons and lie dead:
Why, then I stand already in God's face
And hear 'Since by its fruit a tree is judged,
Show me thy fruit, the latest act of thine!
For in the last is summed the first and all.'
I must plead
This condemnation of a man to-day." [3]

"'*Quis pro Domino?*
Who is upon the Lord's side?' asked the Count.

[1] P. 843, ll. 33–41, 61–67. [2] P. 843, ll. 72, 73, 76, 77.
[3] P. 844, ll. 53–58, 60, 61.

I, who write —

'On receipt of this command,
Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four
They die to-morrow: could it be to-night,
The better, but the work to do takes time.
Set with all diligence a scaffold up,' —

(Here follow detailed directions as to the execution.)

'till to-morrow, then,
Let there be prayer incessant for the five.'" [1]
"Enough, for I may die this very night:
And how should I dare die, this man let live?"

Then as he hands his decision to the attendant who has just come in at the sound of the bell:

"Carry this forthwith to the Governor." [2]

VI. Conclusion

A word by way of general conclusion: It has been said that if anyone enters into the heart of *The Ring and the Book*, he has by so doing had an experience of inestimable value. Certain it is that I know of no man who faces human nature and its passions and emotions as unflinchingly as Robert Browning. *The Ring and the Book* is the most soul-satisfying piece of literature I have ever read. In spite of all its defects, it is wonderful as an effort to interpret human life. In its passion, beauty, and wealth of color, and in its marvellous grasp of human nature, it seems to me it can be compared only with the great operas.

[1] P. 865, ll. 59–65; p. 866, ll. 1, 2.

[2] P. 866, ll. 19–21.

XVII

BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE

Pp. 541–574

Balaustion's Adventure was published in 1871. The dedication is dated London, July 23, 1871, *i.e.* two years and a half after the last volume of *The Ring and the Book*.[1]

Balaustion's Adventure consists of a translation of the *Alkestis* of Euripides, suspended in a story of a Greek girl, Balâustion, who finally recites Euripides' play and describes it — tells how it looked on the stage. Of course, the words of the play alone are from Euripides. All the rest is Browning's, the product of that wonderful imagination which enabled him to make things live before us. In the dedication, Browning says that the work was laid on him "as a task" by the Countess Cowper but "has proved the most delightful of May-month amusements." Since Euripides' tragedy is the reason for the existence of this poem of Browning's, we will begin at the beginning.

I. The Great Greek Dramatists

1. Greece in her prime produced three great writers of tragedy:

[1] We should avoid being confused by the fact that in the Globe Edition, which we are using, both *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871) and *Aristophanes' Apology* (1875) are placed before *The Ring and the Book* (1868–69). It is hard to see any good reason why the chronological order and Browning's own arrangement in his collected works (1888–89) have been, in this instance, disregarded in this edition.

a. Æschylus, the greatest, born 525 B.C., died 456 B.C. He gained the first prize for tragic excellence thirteen times. He wrote some 80 plays, or more. Only seven of his plays are in existence. Of these the most famous are his *Prometheus Bound* and his *Agamemnon.*

b. Sophocles, born 495 B.C., died 406 B.C. He defeated Æschylus in the year 468, and won all together about twenty victories. He wrote over a hundred plays, of which only seven survive. The best known are the *Antigone* and the *Œdipus Tyrannus.*

c. Euripides, born 480 B.C., died 406 B.C. (died, a younger man, the same year as Sophocles). He defeated Sophocles in 441, but gained the first prize only five times in all. He wrote about 75 pieces, of which eighteen are extant. His most widely known, outside of those which we shall presently mention as translated by Browning, are probably the *Electra* and the *Orestes.*

2. The one great writer of comedy was Aristophanes, born about 450 B.C., died about 380 B.C. He won several prizes. He wrote over 50 comedies, of which eleven are extant, some of the greatest being the *Knights,* the *Clouds,* the *Birds,* and the *Frogs.*

3. These great dramatic contests were held in the Dionysiac Theatre in Athens, at the *greater Dionysia,* or greater festival in honor of Dionysus, the god of wine (also called Bacchus). Of the three or four annual festivals in his honor, two are known as the *greater* and the *lesser Dionysia.* The lesser Dionysia were celebrated in the country places at the first tasting of the new wine, and covered four days, — usually days corresponding to our Dec. 19–22. The greater Dionysia were held in the city of Athens six days, and covered dates usually equivalent to our March 28–April 2. On the last three days of this

supreme Dionysiac festival, the great contests took place in the theatre.

4. Both Browning and Mrs. Browning were very fond of Greek. Browning has translated three plays — the *Alkestis* and the *Herakles* of Euripides and the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus. Mrs. Browning translated Æschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, and many short poems and parts of poems by Greek authors. Both were especially fond of Euripides; witness the half of a stanza from Mrs. Browning's *Wine of Cyprus* which Browning has placed at the beginning of *Balaustion's Adventure*. Of Browning's own attitude, the work he has done on Euripides is eloquent evidence, especially the discussion he has carried on in his *Aristophanes' Apology*, "which," says Mahaffy, "is, by the way, an *Euripides' Apology* also, if such be required in the present day." [1]

II. The Alkestis of Euripides

The word is usually spelled *Alcestis*, and pronounced with a soft *c*. Browning follows the Greek form.

1. The *Alkestis* was presented in the spring of 438 B.C. Euripides did not win the prize with it. Sophocles won the prize that year.[2]

2. The story of the *Alkestis* is just this:

Admetos, King of Thessaly, was due to die. But he has in his household the god Apollo, who had been banished

[1] Prof. J. P. Mahaffy, of Trinity College, Dublin, *A History of Classical Greek Literature*, London, 1880, vol. I, p. 466 footnote. Mahaffy's whole sentence is: "This allusion to Mr. Browning suggests the remark that he has treated the controversy between Euripides and Aristophanes with more learning and ability than all other critics, in his *Aristophanes' Apology*, which is, by the way, an *Euripides' Apology* also, if such be required in the present day."

[2] Browning, p. 570, ll. 65, 66; p. 573, ll. 73–75; p. 574, ll. 22–29.

by Zeus to serve Admetos for a time as a shepherd. Now, Apollo appealed to the Fates to spare Admetos, who was at the point of death. The Fates consented on condition that another should die in his place — be substitute for his life. No one was found willing to do it except Admetos' wife, Alkestis. Admetos was just selfish enough to save his own life by the sacrifice of his wife's. He recovered, and in due time Death foreclosed on Alkestis. Then Admetos wailed and tore his hair. But he had made the bargain. Death was inexorable. So Alkestis died.

And presently Herakles arrives at the house of his friend Admetos, on his way to perform one of his great labors, — now going to conquer the man-eating horses of the Thracian Diomedes. Herakles sees signs of grief, but is prevailed upon to stay at Admetos' palace, not knowing the Queen is dead. While he feasts, they go with her body to the tomb. Herakles learns the truth from a servant, goes to the tomb by another road so that he does not meet the returning funeral procession, lies in wait there until Death comes to drink up the wine and blood of sacrifices set as offerings to him, seizes Death and wrestles with him and compels him to give up Alkestis. Then Herakles brings her back under his lion-skin, and tries to compel Admetos to receive this woman whom Herakles says he won at a wrestling. When Admetos has protested and resisted enough, Herakles sets the wife before them and restores her to her husband.

III. Browning's Translation of the Alkestis

Though sometimes summarizing parts of the play, Browning puts forth most of the story in a translation of the exact words of Euripides. This translation has received high praise; *e.g.* Mahaffy in 1880 considers it "by far the best

translation" of the *Alkestis* yet made.[1] It is absolutely literal. Browning has not only followed the original word by word, but he gives the exact root-meaning of words, even where a literal translator would think himself justified in taking a more general sense.[2]

Browning's literalness extends to the exact Greek form of proper names, where we usually have the form that has come through the Latin. Thus: *Alkestis*[3] (Alcestis), *Apollon*[4] (Apollo), *Admetos*[5] (Admetus), *Herakles*[6] (Hercules), Phoibos[7] (Phœbus), *Asklepios*[8] (Æsculapius), *Ais-*

[1] Mahaffy, *A History of Classical Greek Literature*, London, 1880, vol. I, p. 329: "By far the best translation is Mr. Browning's in his *Balaustion's Adventure*, but it is much to be regretted that he did not render the choral odes into lyric verse. No one has more thoroughly appreciated the mean features of Admetus and Pheres, and their dramatic propriety."

But Prof. R. G. Moulton, in a paper read before the London Browning Society in 1891 (*Browning Soc.'s Papers*, Pt. XIII, No. 67), insists that Browning has, in "his interpretations of words and sentences" and in his comment on the play, misrepresented the character of Admetos, — this being due to Browning's having "caught a wrong impression as to one of the main elements of the Greek story."

As to Mahaffy's opinion of Browning's translation of the *Agamemnon*, see pp. 268 and 277 in the same vol. cited above, and as to Browning's translation of the *Herakles*, p. 348. Mahaffy (p. 268) speaks of Browning's "matchless hand — matchless, I conceive, in conveying the deeper spirit of the Greek poets," "his excess of conscience as a translator," and (p. 277) "his genius for reproducing Greek plays." Mahaffy calls Browning's "an over-faithful version" of the *Agamemnon* and says his *Herakles* is an "admirable translation" which will give "English readers a thoroughly faithful idea of this splendid play." In the light of Mahaffy's testimony, I think we may trust Browning's handling of the *Alkestis*.

[2] So Arthur Symons, in his *Introduction to the Study of Browning*, London, 1886, p. 152; new ed., 1906, pp. 172, 173.

[3] P. 544, l. 13; p. 546, l. 55; p. 547, l. 51; and throughout the poem.

[4] P. 545, l. 63; p. 547, l. 12; p. 557, l. 11; and often.

[5] P. 545, ll. 61, 79; p. 546, l. 50; and throughout.

[6] P. 544, ll. 21, 30, 50; p. 554, ll. 18, 47, 56; and throughout.

[7] *e.g.* p. 545, l. 75; p. 546, l. 46; p. 548, l. 12.

[8] P. 545, l. 75.

chulos[1] (Æschylus), *Sophokles*[2] (Sophocles), and a great host of others.[3] This practice he follows consistently in all three of his great Greek pieces wherever such names occur. Browning's idea in doing this he himself explains in the introduction to his translation of the *Agamemnon*,[4] and we cannot help feeling that there is much force in what he says.

This plan extends even to adjectives, made anew, direct from the Greek, by the addition of English endings; *e.g.* *Dionusiac*[5] (Dionysiac), *Thrakian*[6] (Thracian), *Aigaian*[7] (Ægean), *Pulhian*[8] (Pythian), *Ludian*[9] (Lydian), *Phrugian*[10] (Phrygian), and many others. We can understand Browning's motive in this, but the process certainly makes curious-looking English words.

Akin to the tendency to complete literalness is Browning's using in English so many Greek words; *e.g.* *Baccheion*[11] (temple of Bacchus), *Moirai*[12] (the Fates), *rhesis*[13] (a speech in a play), *pharos*[14] (cloak), *peplos*[15] (robe), *turannos*[16] (king), and many others. But inasmuch as these words are usually found in Browning's comment, not in his translation of Euripides' lines, the chief reason for using them must be to create Greek atmosphere.

[1] *e.g.* p. 542, ll. 3, 62; p. 543, l. 9; p. 544, l. 74.
[2] *e.g.* p. 542, l. 3; p. 543, l. 39; p. 544, l. 74.
[3] See the first 50 lines of the poem for abundance of examples.
[4] Pp. 1095, 1096.
[5] P. 542, l. 1; p. 570, l. 74; and often.
[6] *e.g.* p. 554, l. 64; p. 555, l. 8.
[7] P. 557, l. 33.
[8] P. 557, l. 12.
[9] P. 559, l. 41.
[10] P. 559, l. 42.
[11] P. 545, ll. 39, 49.
[12] *e.g.* p. 545, l. 84; p. 552, l. 15.
[13] P. 543, l. 46.
[14] P. 549, l. 71.
[15] P. 553, l. 36; p. 565, l. 18.
[16] P. 562, l. 25.

IV. The Narrative in which Browning has Suspended the Play

1. Here we see Browning's lack of critical judgment. It is an excellent scheme — to make the play live in a framework of narrative, but he has made the setting unnecessarily complicated. What we want is for the girl Balaustion to tell how she saw the play — what the actors said, how the play looked. But Browning has introduced several kinks.

a. He places Balaustion in the second period (421–413 B.C.) of the Peloponnesian war, when the Athenians carried the war into Sicily. Syracuse was a Corinthian colony founded about 735 B.C. on the east coast of Sicily. Syracuse held with Sparta in the war. In the summer of 415 B.C., Nikias led an expedition against Syracuse, and laid siege to the city. He was reinforced the following year, but was overwhelmingly defeated in the autumn of 413 B.C.

The incident which Browning relates as Balaustion's adventure he got from Plutarch's *Lives of Illustrious Men*, — in the biography of Nikias, where it is related that many Athenians, taken prisoners by the Syracusans, were "saved for the sake of Euripides" by repeating his poems, and that many captives who finally got back to Athens went and thanked Euripides for their release. And Plutarch goes on:

> "Nor need this be any wonder, for it is told that a ship of Caunus fleeing into one of their harbors for protection, pursued by pirates, was not received, but forced back, till one asked if they knew any of Euripides's verses, and on their saying they did, they were admitted, and their ship brought into harbor."[1]

[1] Clough's Translation, ed. Boston, 1895, vol. III, p. 329; same vol. and p. in impression of 1906. Cf. North's Translation, ed. with Int. by Wyndham, London, 1895, vol. IV, pp. 42, 43; and Perrin's Translation, *Nicias and Alcibiades*, New York, 1912, pp. 105, 106.

Browning seized upon this incident, and his Balaustion (a nickname, "Wild-pomegranate-flower" [1]) is a girl from Rhodes, who protested against Rhodes' forsaking the side of Athens after the Athenian disaster in Sicily; she crossed, with a few friends, to Kaunos (Caunus) in Asia Minor and went with them on this ship, and she is the one who recites Euripides for the Syracusans (the piece being the *Alkestis*) and saves the ship she is on. Fine and completely without confusion, if Browning had only presented her as reciting the tragedy to the people of Syracuse and telling how it looked when she saw it on the stage.[2]

b. But this Browning does not do. He presents Balaustion some time afterward, sitting in Athens talking with four girls — "Petalé, Phullis, Charopé, Chrusion" [3] — and telling them how she saved the ship at Syracuse, and then finally repeating to these four girls the *Alkestis* and describing it, as she did for the Syracusans at that memorable time. So, be sure of the situation. Either plan would have served: either to present Balaustion giving the play to the Syracusans, or to present her reciting and describing it for these four girls.[4] But combining the two as Browning does is complicated. There is confusion from this wheel within wheel.

2. And again Browning's defects are apparent at the

[1] P. 543, ll. 85–87; cf. the explanatory ll. following; also p. 544, ll. 52–56.

[2] It should be noticed that Balaustion had not seen the play at Athens but at Kameiros (Camirus) in the island of Rhodes: p. 541, ll. 1, 2; p. 544, ll. 38–43.

[3] P. 541, ll. 4, 5. They are sitting "by the streamlet-side" near the temple of Bacchus, p. 545, ll. 37–39, 49–58.

[4] If this latter plan had been adopted, it would have given Browning the same opportunity he now has for description of, and comment on, the play, but would have sacrificed the beautiful story of Balaustion's saving the ship at Syracuse and would, of course, have changed the title of his poem.

end. He had poor judgment; he did not know when to stop. After he has done admirably what he set out to do and has closed his work with Euripides, he then suggests a version of his own of the story of Alkestis, — a version which is weak and flabby as compared with the splendid tragedy of Euripides. It is almost incredible that Robert Browning should do this thing, after his wonderful appreciation of Herakles' part in Euripides' play: Browning's new version suggested leaves out the finest thing in the whole story — Herakles' victory over Death.

3. To sum up: Browning's translation of the *Alkestis* and the comment and description in the mouth of Balaustion are magnificent. The introductory narrative is interesting but confusing. The appendix suggesting a different form of the story is unfortunate and weak; it mars the rest. Subtracting, then, the introduction, except to remember that Balaustion is reciting the play and telling how she saw it acted, and leaving off the conclusion, or appendix, we have the *Alkestis* of Euripides acted before our eyes, — one of the finest things in any literature — the genius of Euripides plus the genius of Robert Browning.[1]

V. The Character of Herakles

And the finest thing in the work is the character of Herakles — our further study this morning. The story in the play itself is interesting and striking — and so lacking in tangles. The character of Admetos is interesting — so selfish and such a change in him due to the experience of grief. The character of Alkestis, in the sacrifice of her life that her husband might live, is beautiful. But after all, your thoughts, when they turn to *Balaustion's Adventure*,

[1] The presentation of the play begins with Balaustion's description of the scene (p. 545, l. 59) and closes with her comments (p. 570, ll. 64–79).

will see the figure of Herakles standing there, with his superb strength and joy — a fine refreshing figure in the world's weakness and sorrowfulness.

A. Herakles appears in the play at a moment when the dramatic contrast of his nature to the nature of the others will count for most.

1. By the soliloquy of Apollo and the dialogue between Apollo and Death, we have learned the exact situation, — just how cowardly and selfish Admetos has been — just how he has grasped at the slightest chance of saving his life, no matter how much it costs — how cowardly and selfish all the rest are, no one willing to die in his place except his good wife Alkestis — and how this coward, this life-grasping man, has been willing to let her be his substitute, and now she is dying that he may live. Our sympathies can hardly be expected to go out to such a man now in his distress at his wife's dying hour.

2. We further learn of the progress of Alkestis to her doom, by the words of the matron who comes out and reports what is going on inside. And the full pitifulness of the situation is emphasized by the lamentations of the chorus.

3. The climax of this tension comes when Alkestis herself is brought out to look her last on the sun ere she descend to the unsunned spaces of the lower world. Each harrowing detail of her death is set before us, — her farewell to the sun and the beauty of the world — her charge to her husband never to take another wife — her pitiful farewell to her children — her shivering at death's touch — her imagining the figure of the boatman of the Styx — her gasping out her last breath. Our sympathies turn away from the husband in spite of all his weeping and protesting. The laments of the chorus and their praises of her only make us feel keenly the utter selfishness of him and them.

4. Presently Admetos withdraws with Alkestis' body into the palace, to prepare it for the tomb. The foreground is filled with the aged chorus, lamenting the woeful case and praising the dead queen. Alkestis, the only one generous and great-souled among them, is dead, — dead through the immeasurable selfishness of her husband. And the chorus, petty, selfish, like himself, can only excuse him, and praise her sacrifice. Death is inexorable and victorious, and the grief of Admetos' palace seems to spread its shadow over everything, enveloping in gloom all goodness and beauty and truth.

5. And suddenly a change — a new angle — a new light, — all from the coming of a man.[1] For Herakles startles them with his big voice. He is here, and things seem different all of a sudden.

> "Oh, the thrill that ran through us!
> Never was aught so good and opportune
> As that great interrupting voice!"[2]

For outside the palace, maundered the aged chorus; inside, Admetos and the servants were laying out Alkestis' body, and the sense of it — the realization of "what was a-doing inside" —

> "Came putting out what warmth i' the world was left."[3]

[1] Herakles was the son of Zeus and a human mother, Alkmene: cf. Browning, p. 555, ll. 17, 18; p. 564, ll. 40–43, 68, 69; and often. Browning sometimes calls him a man (*e.g.* p. 547, ll. 17, 18; p. 556, ll. 73, 74), sometimes a god (*e.g.* p. 554, ll. 59, 60; p. 562, ll. 85, 86). Browning makes good use of the two-fold nature of Herakles, playing off the one element against the other, as *e.g.* in p. 554, ll. 19–22, and p. 564, ll. 38, 39.

[2] P. 554, ll. 1–3.

[3] P. 554, ll. 3–10. Browning's phrase (l. 4) "this dispirited old age" means the chorus, — "old age" for the aged chorus collectively. Cf. p. 547 ll. 42–47.

"Then, as it happens at a sacrifice,
When, drop by drop, some lustral bath is brimmed:
Into the thin and clear and cold, at once
They slaughter a whole wine-skin: Bacchos' blood
Sets the white water all a-flame; even so,
Sudden into the midst of sorrow, leapt
Along with the gay cheer of that great voice,
Hope, joy, salvation: Herakles was here!" [1]

B. And the thing that made the change was not anything he said, nor anything he did, but just his presence — the bare fact of his being there — just himself, — this changed things:

"The irresistible sound wholesome heart
O' the hero, —
This drove back, dried up, sorrow at its source." [2]

This is what Character always does. It does not need to be demonstrated either by word or deed, in order to be full of healing benefits to others. "This is that which we call Character, —" says Emerson, "a reserved force which acts directly by presence, and without means."

C. But it is also true that Character is revealed in what a man says and does. The change which came with the sound of Herakles' great voice was deepened by his next words and his great brave laugh. For when he had gone into the palace a few minutes later, Balaustion says:

"As for the sympathisers left to muse,
There was a change, a new light thrown on things,
Contagion from the magnanimity
O' the man whose life lay on his hand so light,
As up he stepped, pursuing duty still
'Higher and harder,' as he laughed and said." [3]

[1] P. 554, ll. 11–18.

[2] P. 554, ll. 26, 27, 30.

[3] P. 556, ll. 71–76.

It is worth while, therefore, to notice in this poem what are the indications of the chief elements in Herakles' character.

1. *Herakles' Estimate of the Value of his Life.*

Herakles counted not his life dear.

a. The man who guards his life so miserly defeats his own purpose. This is not advising recklessness. But the fact is that men with normal red blood like a spice of danger. And the fact is that great souls realize that their lives are little worth. It is only the petty man who thinks his life is of so much importance that it ought to be guarded jealously. The really great man knows something of how little his life really amounts to, knows it is not at all essential to anyone, and esteems it very lightly. I have often noticed how the lives that mean most are constantly esteemed of no value by their possessors, and the lives which are of no use to the world are very precious to their possessors. Some of the most worthless lives I have seen were guarded by their possessors with an almost frantic anxiety lest anything should happen to them.

b. Here in this play was the chorus lamenting how Admetos' frantic desire to save his life had brought his wife to death in his stead —

> "the pact
> He made, with eyes wide open, long ago —
> Made and was, if not glad, content to make." [1]

She alone had been willing to do it. All the rest of them were of an equal selfishness and cowardice with Admetos. But when Herakles comes, they are all conscious of a different atmosphere, — no grasping after life — there faced them one who hazarded his life every day and cared not for it —

> "Herakles, who held his life
> Out on his hand, for any man to take." [2]

[1] P. 552, ll. 8–10.

[2] P. 554, ll. 47, 48.

His coming spoiled their lamentation. They are at once embarrassed about trying to explain to Herakles what the woe is.[1] They know surely that he cannot look at it as they do. He who holds his life so light, what will he think of them?

> "Clearly there was no telling such an one
> How, when their monarch tried who loved him more
> Than he loved them, and found they loved, as he,
> Each man, himself, and held, no otherwise,
> That, of all evils in the world, the worst
> Was — being forced to die, whate'er death gain:
> How all this selfishness in him and them
> Caused certain sorrow which they sang about, —
> I think that Herakles, who held his life
> Out on his hand, for any man to take —
> I think his laugh had marred their threnody."[2]

c. Surely it was this attitude which Herakles held toward life that helped them to reconstruct their views of the calamity which had come to Admetos' house. So much vitality as great Herakles had and so lightly esteemed! —

> "a new light thrown on things,
> Contagion from the magnanimity
> O' the man whose life lay on his hand so light,
> As up he stepped, pursuing duty still
> 'Higher and harder,' as he laughed and said."[3]
>
> "Admetos' private grief
> Shrank to a somewhat pettier obstacle
> I' the way o' the world."[4]

2. *The Strength of Herakles.*

a. Strength is normal; weakness is abnormal. How can human beings be content to live at a "poor dying

[1] P. 554, ll. 31–49.
[2] P. 554, ll. 39–49. A "threnody" is a song of lamentation.
[3] P. 556, ll. 72–76.
[4] P. 557, ll. 2–4.

rate"? We ought to be tingling with health and power to the finger-tips. Emerson's great claim for power is that it comes from a plus condition of life. The coming of Herakles is the coming of a superabundant vitality into the situation. There he stands, with the lion-skin around his shoulders, tired but strong. It is natural to get tired — that's different from weakness. Herakles is tired from journeying and fighting; his "weary happy face," his "happy weary laugh," are there[1] — notice that they are "weary"; he is

> "glad to give
> Poor flesh and blood their respite and relief
> In the interval 'twixt fight and fight again,"[2]

and he does it with triumphant grace at his banquet. But he is made of strength in spite of all possibility of weariness.

(1) His great arm strains Admetos' head pretty severely against the lion's hide "on that broad breast" —

> "Till the king's cheek winced at the thick rough gold."[3]

(2) His great hand on the servant's shoulder has to be "careful lest it crush"; his great stature makes him tower over the servant:

> "A great hand, careful lest it crush,
> Startled him on the shoulder: up he stared,
> And over him, who stood but Herakles!"[4]

(3) And when Herakles learns from the servant that Alkestis is dead, the splendid strength gives him the cue what to do. "In a spasm and splendour of resolve,"[5] he decides to go and take her away from Death. He will go with his bare hands and compel Death to give Alkestis

[1] P. 554, ll. 21, 31.
[2] P. 556, ll. 39–41.
[3] P. 556, ll. 34–37. "The thick rough gold" means, of course, the hair on the lion's hide.
[4] P. 562, ll. 82–84.
[5] P. 564, l. 38.

up.[1] Notice the superb strength made ready for the contest:

"So, one look upward, as if Zeus might laugh
Approval of his human progeny, —
One summons of the whole magnific frame,
Each sinew to its service, — up he caught,
And over shoulder cast, the lion-shag,
Let the club go, — for had he not those hands?" [2]

"So, to the struggle off strode Herakles." [3]

(4) And when he comes back, it is still the strength which impresses them:

"In he strode." [4]

"Somehow, a victory — for there stood the strength,
Happy, as always; something grave, perhaps;
The great vein-cordage on the fret-worked front,
Black-swollen, beaded yet with battle-dew
The yellow hair o' the hero! — his big frame
A-quiver with each muscle sinking back
Into the sleepy smooth it leaped from late." [5]

(5) He has brought Alkestis, although they do not know yet that it is she:

"Under the great guard of one arm, there leant
A shrouded something, live and woman-like,
Propped by the heart-beats 'neath the lion-coat." [6]

And it is his strong hands that did the work: Herakles tells

"how he sprang from ambuscade,
Captured Death, caught him in that pair of hands." [7]

How much is told by saying so little!

[1] P. 564, ll. 47–54, 71–73. [2] P. 564, ll. 68–73; cf. also ll. 74, 75.

[3] P. 565, l. 6. Notice the powerful movement "strode" (also p. 564, l. 74; p. 567, l. 14).

[4] P. 567, l. 14.

[5] P. 567, ll. 21–27. How well Herakles' figure full of strength goes with his "great brow acquainted with command" (p. 567, l. 86).

[6] P. 567, ll. 28–30. [7] P. 570, ll. 29, 30.

b. But the chief striking thing about Herakles' strength is that he does not use it for his own gain, but devotes it to the service of humanity:

(1) Although it was

> "The irresistible sound wholesome heart
> O' the hero"

which "drove back, dried up, sorrow at its source," still all were conscious of the strength there,

> "all the mightiness
> At labour in the limbs that, for man's sake,
> Laboured and meant to labour their life long." [1]

(2) His "fight and fight again" is "all for the world's sake." [2]

(3) Herakles at his banquet is simply replenishing his strength that he may serve men better:

> "Out from the labour into the repose,
> Ere out again and over head and ears
> I' the heart of labour, all for love of men:
> Making the most o' the minute, that the soul
> And body, strained to height a minute since,
> Might lie relaxed in joy, this breathing-space,
> For man's sake more than ever." [3]

And the feast has left

> "the hero ready to begin
> And help mankind, whatever woe came next." [4]

(4) And on the instant, when he learns that Alkestis is dead, he devotes his whole splendid strength to the task of

[1] P. 554, ll. 26–30. In the last three lines quoted above, the emphasis should be on "for man's sake," but I have not been at liberty to italicize the words because of the danger of giving the idea that Browning has them printed that way.

[2] P. 556, ll. 41, 42.

[3] P. 562, ll. 52–58; see also the lines following, which are equally to the point.

[4] P. 563, ll. 2, 3.

bringing her from Death's hands to her husband, — Herakles' strength against the "king o' the dæmons," [1] for his friend's sake.

It is this for which strength exists — that we may serve. "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

3. *The Courage of Herakles.*

a. Amid those who are full of forebodings of danger to him, Herakles is undaunted. He is on his way to Thrace to subdue Diomedes and his man-eating, fire-breathing horses, and the conversation between Herakles and the chorus shows how foreign to him are all their fears. He laughs at this labor which he has to do for Eurustheus the Tirunthian.[2] He is entirely inexperienced in what is before him, *i.e.* he has never yet been in Thrace nor met with Diomedes, but he is quite free from anxiety over it:

> "Battle there may be:
> I must refuse no labour, all the same." [3]

He has fought too many battles to care for this one. The harder they make it out to be, the fiercer Diomedes and his horses who "mince up men with those quick jaws," [4] the less they stir in him anything except eagerness for the fight:

> "Another laugh.
> 'Why, just the labour, just the lot for me
> Dost thou describe in what I recognise!
> Since hard and harder, high and higher yet,
> Truly this lot of mine is like to go
> If I must needs join battle with the brood
> Of Ares.

[1] The phrase is from p. 570, ll. 27, 28; cf. the "king of the corpses," p. 564, l. 48.

[2] P. 554, ll. 50, 60; cf. p. 555, l. 8.

[3] P. 554, ll. 65–71.

[4] P. 555, ll. 2, 3.

But there is nobody shall ever see
Alkmené's son shrink foeman's hand before!'" [1]

b. Amid all those who stand in awe and terror of Death, Herakles has no fear. He will seek Death at the tomb, attack him, and rescue Alkestis from him.[2] And Herakles' plan was such that even if he had missed Death at the tomb, even if Death had not come to drink the offerings, Herakles would have gone to Hades and demanded that Pluto and Proserpine restore Alkestis to the earth-life once more:

"But even say I miss the booty, — say,
Death comes not to the boltered blood, — why then,
Down go I, to the unsunned dwelling-place
Of Koré and the king there, — make demand,
Confident I shall bring Alkestis back." [3]

But it was not necessary to go. He found Death at the tomb, "caught him in that pair of hands."

c. And so it was his courage as well as his strength that conquered. He did not seek the easy things. The harder the task the more he warmed to it, the more lion in his soul.

4. *The Magnanimity of Herakles.*

Magnanimity — literally, *greatmindedness*, — one of the finest things in the world. We don't hear the word very often now. Can it be that the quality is dying out?

The magnanimity of Herakles is manifested in everything: not one touch of pettiness — not any littleness of thought.

a. He is entirely devoid of suspicion. This being suspicious of everybody is a poor miserable way to live. As soon as Admetos assures Herakles that it is all right and he must stay, it is enough. He takes Admetos at his word:

[1] P. 555, ll. 8–14, 17, 18. Diomedes, king of the Bistones, was the son of Ares (Mars), the god of war; see ll. 6–8.

[2] P. 504, ll. 47–54. [3] P. 564, ll. 55–59.

"Whereat the hero, who was truth itself,
Let out the smile again, repressed awhile
Like fountain-brilliance one forbids to play.
He did too many grandnesses, to note
Much in the meaner things about his path:
And stepping there, with face towards the sun,
Stopped seldom to pluck weeds or ask their names.
Therefore he took Admetos at the word." [1]

b. Herakles is so magnanimous that nothing is beneath his attention. It is only the little-minded man whose dignity is too great for him to have anything to do with some folks or be interested in their little affairs. Here comes this great-souled man out from his feast and sees there a servant very sour and disturbed. Well, the great fighter does not despise the opportunity to cheer up this serving-man: Herakles "ready to help mankind,"

"Even though what came next should be nought more
Than the mean querulous mouth o' the man, remarked
Pursing its grievance up till patience failed
And the sage needs must rush out, as we saw,
To sulk outside and pet his hate in peace.
By no means would the Helper have it so:
He who was just about to handle brutes
In Thrace, and bit the jaws which breathed the flame, —
Well, if a good laugh and a jovial word
Could bridle age which blew bad humours forth,
That were a kind of help, too!" [2]

And so "this grand benevolence" hails "the ungracious one," and tries to cheer him up.[3]

c. And Herakles' magnanimity is with him at the end. He makes no boast. He speaks little of what he has done.[4]

[1] P. 556, ll. 24–31. [2] P. 563, ll. 4–14; cf. p. 561, ll. 46–55.
[3] P. 563, ll. 14–16. Notice the argument in Herakles' speech in the lines following.
[4] P. 570, ll. 26–30.

He wants no reward. He will not stay. He goes on to the "winter world of Thrace," [1] to battle, perhaps to death.

> "Fain would Admetos keep that splendid smile
> Ever to light him. 'Stay with us, thou heart!
> Remain our house-friend!'
> 'At some other day!
> Now, of necessity, I haste!' smiled he." [2]

5. *The Joy of Herakles.*

His light esteem of life, his strength, his courage, his magnanimity, — all make the character of Herakles a great one. But more striking than any of these is the joy of Herakles. It is this characteristic which familiarity with the poem will leave longest in your thoughts. It runs through all the poem.

a. In his very first words — the words that startle the onlookers when Herakles comes — they catch "the gay cheer of that great voice," [3] and then they look at

> "the weary happy face of him, — half God,
> Half man, which made the god-part God the more." [4]

b. Notice his laughter: "the happy weary laugh," [5] his laugh about his labors,[6] "another laugh." [7]

> "I think his laugh had marred their threnody." [8]

c. Notice his great smile, when he is not laughing:

(1) When he thought his friend was in bereavement, he repressed the smile, like shutting off a fountain. As soon as he is pursuaded that the condition is not so sorrowful as he thought, he lets out the smile again.[9]

[1] P. 567, l. 4; cf. p. 547, ll. 19, 20.
[2] P. 570, ll. 45–48.
[3] P. 554, l. 17.
[4] P. 554, ll. 21, 22.
[5] P. 554, l. 31.
[6] P. 554, ll. 59, 60; cf. ll. 61–63.
[7] P. 555, l. 8.
[8] P. 554, l. 49.
[9] P. 556, ll. 24–26.

(2) When Herakles came out from the banquet,

"There smiled the mighty presence, all one smile." [1]

(3) He lost the smile again at learning from the servant that Alkestis was dead. The servant marked

"The movement of the mouth, how lip pressed lip,
And either eye forgot to shine, as, fast,
He plucked the chaplet from his forehead, dashed
The myrtle-sprays down, trod them underfoot!
And all the joy and wonder of the wine
Withered away, like fire from off a brand
The wind blows over — beacon though it be,
Whose merry ardour only meant to make
Somebody all the better for its blaze,
And save lost people in the dark: quenched now!" [2]

(4) After the struggle, "there stood the strength, happy, as always." [3] But Herakles was not all back until the smile came, — it was so a part of himself:

"and last the smile
Shone out, all Herakles was back again." [4]

(5) And it was "that splendid smile" of Herakles which Admetos wanted to keep "ever to light him." [5]

d. Notice Herakles' zest at the feast, and his joy and song.

(1) A glimpse of it as the door opens to let the servant out:

"We faced about,
Fronted the palace where the mid-hall-gate
Opened — not half, nor half of half, perhaps —
Yet wide enough to let out light and life,
And warmth and bounty and hope and joy, at once.
Festivity burst wide, fruit rare and ripe
Crushed in the mouth of Bacchos, pulpy-prime," [6]

and so on.

[1] P. 562, l. 85; see also ll. 86, 87.
[2] P. 564, ll. 23–32.
[3] P. 567, ll. 21, 22.
[4] P. 567, ll. 33, 34.
[5] P. 570, ll. 45, 46.
[6] P. 561, ll. 29–35; see ll. 36–41.

(2) The account, in the mouth of the complaining servant, of how the feast has gone:

> "And in his hands
> Taking the ivied goblet, drinks and drinks
> The unmixed product of black mother-earth,
> Until the blaze o' the wine went round about
> And warmed him: then he crowns with myrtle sprigs
> His head, and howls discordance." [1]

(3) Balaustion's sketch of what the feast has been:

> "Just a garland's grace
> About the brow, a song to satisfy
> Head, heart and breast, and trumpet-lips at once,
> A solemn draught of true religious wine,
> And, — how should I know? — half a mountain goat
> Torn up and swallowed down, — the feast was fierce
> But brief: all cares and pains took wing and flew." [2]

All these fragmentary descriptions show in Herakles the same sheer exuberance of joy.

e. The origin and object of all this joy Balaustion has given us, as she looks after Herakles going to the tomb to conquer Death:

> "Gladness be with thee, Helper of our world!
> I think this is the authentic sign and seal
> Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,
> And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
> Into a rage to suffer for mankind,
> And recommence at sorrow." [3]

D. And so the last figure I leave with you from our study of Browning this semester is the figure of Herakles, —

[1] P. 561, ll. 70–75: "howls discordance," no matter how well he sings, because the servant feels that Herakles' song is out of harmony with the grief of the palace.

[2] P. 562, l. 87–p. 563, l. 1.

[3] P. 564, ll. 76–81; see also the lines following.

Herakles with his scorn of petty grasping after life, his strength, his courage, his magnanimity, his invincible joy, — one whose very presence was such that, with the sound of his voice,

> "Sudden into the midst of sorrow, leapt
> Hope, joy, salvation: Herakles was here!" [1]

I would to God we might all face life with somewhat of the attitude Herakles had.

[1] P. 554, ll. 16, 18; the passage already quoted more fully.

APPENDIX A

A LIST OF BOOKS

THIS list does not undertake to be a complete bibliography. The divisions in the list are simply for ease of reference. The groups, of course, overlap; *e.g.* biography and criticism are combined in many books. The general plan within each division is to arrange the books as nearly as possible in the order of their first appearance. A majority of the books here listed are still (1914) in print.

I. BROWNING'S WORKS

A. One-volume editions:

1. *Globe Edition*, edited by Augustine Birrell, New York, The Macmillan Co.

2. *Cambridge Edition*, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

B. Editions in several volumes:

1. Edition in 17 vols., London, Smith, Elder & Co. Browning's last revision, the text followed by all recent editions.

2. *Riverside Edition*, 6 vols., edited by George Willis Cooke, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

3. Edition in 3 vols., Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

4. *Camberwell Edition*, 12 vols., edited by Miss Charlotte Porter and Miss Helen A. Clarke, New York, T. Y. Crowell & Co.

5. *Centenary Edition*, 10 vols., introductions by Frederic G. Kenyon, London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1912; Boston, R. H. Hinkley Co. Limited and expensive edition.

C. There are an immense number of editions of an individual poem or play, or of a group of selected works, — many with notes, some with illustrations. I have not tried to make a list of them.

II. BIOGRAPHY OF BROWNING

1. William Sharp, *Life of Robert Browning*, London, W. Scott, 1890; New York, Chas. Scribner's Sons. (*Great Writers.*)

2. Edmund W. Gosse, *Robert Browning: Personalia*, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1890.

3. Mrs. Sutherland Orr, *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, pub. 1891; new edition revised and in part rewritten by Frederic G. Kenyon, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1908.

4. Arthur Waugh, *Robert Browning*, Boston, Small, Maynard & Co., 1900. (*Westminster Biographies.*)

5. Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning*, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1903. (*English Men of Letters.*)

6. Edward Dowden, *Robert Browning*, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd.; New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1904. (*Temple Biographies.*)

7. James Douglas, *Robert Browning*, New York, James Pott & Co., 1904. (*Bookman Biographies.*)

8. Charles H. Herford, *Robert Browning*, New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1905.

9. W. Hall Griffin, *The Life of Robert Browning*, completed and edited by Harry C. Minchin, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1910.

10. *Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, 1845–1846*, 2 vols., New York, Harper & Bros., 1899.

11. *Robert Browning and Alfred Domett*, Browning's letters to Domett, etc., edited by Frederic G. Kenyon, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1906.

III. Introductions and Primers

1. Hiram Corson, *An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning's Poetry*, Boston, D. C. Heath & Co., 1886.

2. Arthur Symons, *An Introduction to the Study of Browning*, London, 1886; new edition, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1906.

3. William J. Alexander, *An Introduction to the Poetry of Robert Browning*, Boston, Ginn & Co., 1889.

4. Ella B. Hallock, *Introduction to Browning*, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1913.

5. F. Mary Wilson, *A Primer on Browning*, London, Macmillan & Co., 1891.

6. Thomas Rain, *Browning for Beginners*, London, Swan, Sonnenschein & Co., 1904; New York, The Macmillan Co.

7. Edward Berdoe, *A Primer of Browning*, London, Routledge, 1904; New York, E. P. Dutton & Co.

8. Esther P. Defries, *Browning Primer*, New York, The Macmillan Co.

IV. Handbooks

1. Mrs. Sutherland Orr, *A Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning*, London, George Bell & Sons, 1885; now in its 11th ed.; New York, The Macmillan Co.

2. Geo. Willis Cooke, *A Guide-Book to the Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning*, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1891.

3. Edward Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopædia*, pub. 1891, 7th ed. 1912, London, George Allen & Co., Ltd.; New York, The Macmillan Co.

V. Criticism and Appreciation

1. Caroline W. H. Dall, *Sordello, a History and a Poem*, Boston, Roberts Bros., 1886.

2. James Fotheringham, *Studies in the Poetry of Robert Browning*, London, 1887; 2d ed., 1888.

3. Mary E. Burt, *Browning's Women*, with an introduction by Edward Everett Hale, Chicago, Kerr & Co., 1887.

4. William G. Kingsland, *Robert Browning, Chief Poet of the Age*, London, Jarvis, 1887; new ed., 1890.

5. Sarah W. Whitman, *Robert Browning in his Relation to the Art of Painting*, Boston Browning Society, 1889.

6. Leon H. Vincent, *A Few Words on Robert Browning*, Philadelphia, Arnold & Co., 1890; 2nd ed., 1895.

7. John T. Nettleship, *Robert Browning: Essays and Thoughts*, London, Matthews, 1890; includes the *Essays on Robert Browning's Poetry* published 1868; new edition, 1909; New York, Chas. Scribner's Sons.

8. Walter Fairfax, *Robert Browning and the Drama*, London, Reeves & Turner, 1891.

9. Oscar L. Triggs, *Browning and Whitman: a Study in Democracy*, London, Swan, Sonnenschein & Co., 1893.

10. Arthur Beatty, *Browning's Verse-form: its Organic Character*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1897. (Doctor's dissertation.)

11. James Fotheringham, *Studies in the Mind and Art of Robert Browning*, London, 1898; 4th ed., New York, Wessels & Bissell Co., 1900.

12. Elizabeth L. Cary, *Browning, Poet and Man: a Survey*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899.

13. Stopford A. Brooke, *The Poetry of Robert Browning*, New York, T. Y. Crowell & Co., 1902.

14. Cora M. MacDonald, *A Study of Browning's Saul*, Chicago, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1902.

15. Josiah Flew, *Studies in Browning*, London, Kelley, 1904.

16. Elizabeth P. Gould, *The Brownings and America*, Boston, The Poet-Lore Co., 1904.

17. M. A. Abbott, *Browning and Meredith: Points of Similarity*, Boston, Richard G. Badger, 1904.

18. F. T. Marzials, *Browning*, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1905.

19. David Duff, *An Exposition of Browning's "Sordello," with Historical and Other Notes*, Edinburgh, Blackwood, 1906.

20. Samuel S. Curry, *Browning and the Dramatic Monologue*, Boston, Expression Co., 1908.

21. Thomas R. Lounsbury, *The Early Literary Career of Robert Browning*, New York, Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1911.

22. Lilian Whiting, *The Brownings: their Life and Art*, Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1911.

23. Thos. M. Parrott, *Vitality of Browning*, New York, James Pott & Co.

VI. Narrative

1. Frederic M. Holland, *Sordello: a Story from Robert Browning*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1881.

2. Frederic M. Holland, *Stories from Robert Browning*, with an introduction by Mrs. Sutherland Orr, London, George Bell & Sons, 1882.

3. Annie Wall, *Sordello's Story Retold in Prose*, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1886.

4. Harvey C. Grumbine, *Stories from Browning*, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1914.

VII. The Ring and the Book

1. Roy S. Stowell, *The Significance of The Ring and the Book*, Boston, The Poet-Lore Co., 1903.

2. Minnie G. Machen, *The Bible in Browning, with Particular Reference to The Ring and the Book*, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1903.

3. *The Old Yellow Book*, Source of Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, in complete Photo-reproduction, with Translation, Essay, and Notes, by Charles W. Hodell, published by the Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908. Contains also all the other source-material bearing on the case.

Same, the translations only, with an introduction and notes by Prof. Hodell, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., no date. (Everyman's Library.)

4. Francis B. Hornbrooke, *The Ring and the Book: An Interpretation*, Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1909.

VIII. Browning's Philosophy and Religion

1. Howard S. Pearson, *Robert Browning: the Thoughts of a Poet on Art and Faith*, a lecture, Birmingham, Eng., Cornish, 1885.

2. Edward Berdoe, *Browning's Message to his Time: his Religion, Philosophy, and Science*, London, Swan, Sonnenschein & Co., 1890; now in its 5th ed.; New York, The Macmillan Co.

3. Edward Berdoe, *Browning and the Christian Faith*, New York, Macmillan & Co., 1896.

4. Henry Jones, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher*, Glasgow, James Maclehose & Sons, 1891; now in its 6th ed.; New York, The Macmillan Co.

5. Frederick Ealand, *Sermons from Browning*, pub. 1892; 2nd ed., London, Brown, Langham & Co., 1905.

6. William F. Revell, *Browning's Criticism of Life*, London, Swan, Sonnenschein & Co., 1892.

7. Brainerd M. Burridge, *Robert Browning as an Exponent of a Philosophy of Life*, Cleveland, 1893.

8. Mrs. Percy Leake, *The Ethics of Browning's Poems*, London, Richards, 1897.

9. Amory H. Bradford, *Spiritual Lessons from Browning*, New York, T. Y. Crowell & Co., 1900.

10. Wm. DeWitt Hyde, *The Art of Optimism as Taught by Robert Browning*, New York, T. Y. Crowell & Co., 1900.

11. Arthur C. Pigou, *Robert Browning as a Religious Teacher*, London, Clay, 1901. (The Burney Essay for 1900 at Cambridge University.)

12. Edward H. Griggs, *The Poetry and Philosophy of Browning: a Handbook of Six Lectures*, New York, B. W. Huebsch, 1905.

13. Frank C. Lockwood, *Modern Poets and Christian Teaching: Robert Browning*, New York, Eaton & Mains, 1906.

14. Ethel M. Naish, *Browning and Dogma*, London, George Bell & Sons, 1906.

15. W. D. Weatherford, *Fundamental Religious Principles in Browning's Poetry*, Nashville, Smith & Lamar, 1907.

16. P. Berger, *Quelques Aspects de la Foi Moderne dans les Poèmes de Robert Browning*, Paris, Société Française d'Imprimerie et de Librairie, 1907.

17. Arthur Rogers, *Prophecy and Poetry: Studies in Isaiah and Browning*, London and New York, Longmans, Green & Co., 1909. (The Bohlen Lectures for 1909.)

18. J. A. Hutton, *Guidance from Robert Browning in Matters of Faith*, London, Methuen & Co.

IX. Concordance

Marie A. Molineux, *A Phrase Book from the Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning*, to which is added an Index containing the significant words not elsewhere noted, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1896.

X. Setting of the Life and Poems of Browning

1. Helen A. Clarke, *Browning's Italy*, New York, The Baker & Taylor Co., 1907.

2. Helen A. Clarke, *Browning's England*, New York, The Baker & Taylor Co., 1908.

3. Helen A. Clarke, *Browning and his Century*, Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, Page & Co., 1912.

XI. Browning Study Programmes

1. Miss Charlotte Porter and Miss Helen A. Clarke, *Browning Study Programmes*, New York, T. Y. Crowell & Co., 1900.

2. H. C. Peterson, *Inductive Studies in Browning*, 2nd ed., Chicago, Ainsworth & Co., 1903.

3. Chicago Browning Society, *Robert Browning's Poetry: Outline Studies*, Chicago, Kerr & Co., 1886.

XII. Browning Society Papers

1. London Browning Society, *Papers*, 12 vols., London, Trübner, 1881–91.

2. London Browning Society, *Browning Studies, being Select Papers*, edited by Edward Berdoe, London, Geo. Allen & Co., Ltd., 1895; New York, Macmillan & Co.

3. Boston Browning Society, *Papers*, selected to represent the work of the Society from 1886–1897, New York, Macmillan & Co., 1897.

XIII. Bibliographies

1. F. J. Furnival, *A Bibliography of Robert Browning, 1833–81*, London, The Browning Society's *Papers*, vol. I, no. 2, 1881. Additions in no. 3, of same vol.

2. John P. Anderson, *Bibliography*, as an Appendix in William Sharp's *Life of Robert Browning*, London, Scott, 1890.

3. Thos. J. Wise and W. R. Nicoll, *Materials for a Bibliography of the Writings of Robert Browning*, in *Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century*, vol. I, pp. 359–627, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1895.

4. Mrs. Sutherland Orr, *Bibliography*, in her *Handbook to the Works of Browning*.

5. Boston Browning Society, *Catalogue of the Library*, Boston, 1897.

6. Brooklyn Public Library, *Robert Browning: a List of Books and Reference to Periodicals* in this Library, Brooklyn, N. Y., 1912.

7. A short list of books is given by Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopædia*, pp. xi and xii, followed by a list of the contents of the vols. of the London Browning Society's *Papers*.

8. *A Chronological List of Robert Browning's Poems and Plays*, in the Globe Edition, pp. 1319–1321, gives Browning's volumes and contents of each volume as they stood when it appeared; also date and place of appearing of poems published elsewhere before being included in a volume.

APPENDIX B

BROWNING'S POEMS SET TO MUSIC

THIS list is based on the Boston Browning Society's collection of songs (now in the Boston Public Library). That collection is supplemented from several directions. A few titles are from a list published in *Poet-Lore*, 1889, vol. I, pp. 430, 431; but most of the settings have appeared since that time.

The order of arrangement in the following list is according to the date of publication of the poems. In all cases where the date of publication of the music can be found, that is put down. The settings of a given poem are arranged in chronological order, as far as possible. Inevitably the list is incomplete.

I. FROM PARACELSUS, 1835

1. In sc. I, the lines beginning "I go to prove my soul." Set to music by Ethel Harraden, London, Jeffreys.

2. In sc. IV, the song "Over the sea our galleys went." Same composer and same publisher.

II. FROM PIPPA PASSES, 1841

1. *Scene from Pippa Passes*, by Wm. Wallace Gilchrist. MS. signed W. W. Gilchrist and dated Apr. 7, 1899. Begins with Pippa's New Year's hymn; then a part of her soliloquy in the prologue; closes with her closing words in the epilogue, including the three lines of the same hymn.

2. Song, "The year's at the spring." Four settings:

a. By Clara Kathleen Rogers, Boston, Schmidt, 1882; same in vol. II of her *Browning Songs*, 1st and 2d series, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

b. By W. H. Neidlinger, New York, Schirmer, 1895.

c. By Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, Op. 44, No. 1, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

d. By Cécile S. Hartog, London, Boosey; Boston, Ditson, 19—.

3. Song, "Give her but a least excuse to love me." Two settings:

a. By Georgina Schuyler, under title *The Page sings to the Queen*, New York, Schirmer, 1882.

b. By Hugh Archibald Clarke, written for the Boston Browning Soc., MS. 1899.

4. Song, "You'll love me yet." Three settings:

a. By Henry K. Hadley, Op. 20, No. 1, Boston, Ditson, 1899.

b. By John Mokrejs, pub. by the author, New York, 1907.

c. By Malcolm Lawson, used at one of the entertainments of the London Browning Soc. Not yet published, as far as could be learned.

5. Song, "Overhead the tree-tops meet." One setting: By Hugh Archibald Clarke, written for the Boston Browning Soc., MS. 1899.

III. From Dramatic Lyrics, 1842

1. *Cavalier Tunes*, viz. I. *Marching Along.* II. *Give a Rouse.* III. *Boot and Saddle.*

a. All three set to music by Chas. Villiers Stanford, solo and chorus, London, Boosey.

b. Second song only, by Maude Valérie White, under title *King Charles*, London, Boosey, 1898.

c. Third song only, by Gustav Kobbé, under title *To horse*, New York, Ditson, 1887.

2. *In a Gondola.*

a. The major part of *In a Gondola* has been set to music by John Parsons Beach, dramatic monologue, Newton Center, Mass., The Wa-Wan Press, 1905. Includes eight portions of the poem.

b. First song only, "I send my heart up to thee, all my heart." Three settings:

(1) By Georgina Schuyler, New York, Schirmer, 1882.

(2) By Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, Op. 44, No. 3, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

(3) By Gena Branscombe, under title *Serenade*, Newton Center, The Wa-Wan Press, 1905.

c. Song, "What are we two?" One setting: By Gena Branscombe, Newton Center, The Wa-Wan Press, 1905.

d. Some part of *In a Gondola*, under that title, duet with 'cello obligato, by Edwin Bending, written for the London Browning Soc. and not yet published.

IV. From A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, 1843

1. Song, "There's a woman like a dew-drop." Set to music by Alexander Campbell Mackenzie, London, Novello, 188–.

V. From Dramatic Romances and Lyrics, 1845

1. *"How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix"* Set to music by Helen J. Ormerod, London, Forsyth, 188–.

2. *The Lost Leader.* Part-song for men's voices, by Ethel Harraden, written for one of the entertainments of the London Browning Soc. Not published.

3. *Earth's Immortalities.* Second poem, entitled *Love*, "So, the year's done with." Set to music by Clara Kathleen Rogers, in vol. II of her *Browning Songs*, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

4. *Song*, "Nay but you, who do not love her." Two settings:

a. By E. C. Gregory, in his *Six Songs*, London, Novello.

b. By Malcolm Lawson, for the London Browning Soc. Not published.

5. *The Boy and the Angel.* Four-part song by Edwin Bending, for the London Browning Soc. Not published.

VI. From Men and Women, 2 vols., 1855

1. *A Lovers' Quarrel.* Two settings:

a. By E. C. Gregory, in his *Six Songs*, London, Novello.

b. By J. Greenhill, for the London Browning Soc. Not published.

2. *A Woman's Last Word.* Four settings:

a. By Leslie Johnson, pub. by the London Browning Soc.

b. By Clara Kathleen Rogers, in vol. II of her *Browning Songs*, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

c. By John Parsons Beach, Newton Center, The Wa-Wan Press, 1903.

d. By Sidney Homer, New York, Schirmer, 1903.

3. *My Star.* Four settings:

a. By Helen A. Clarke, Boston, The Poet-Lore Co., 1892.

b. By W. H. Neidlinger, New York, Schirmer, 1895.

c. By Clara Kathleen Rogers, in vol. II of her *Browning Songs*, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

d. By Sidney Homer, New York, Schirmer, 1903.

4. *Two in the Campagna.* Stanzas VIII and IX only, "I would

that you were all to me." Set to music by Caroline Reinagle, London, Augener, 188–.

5. *One Way of Love*, "All June I bound the rose in sheaves." Four settings:

a. By Helen A. Clarke, song with 'cello obligato, Boston, The Poet-Lore Co., 1892.

b. By E. C. Gregory, in his *Six Songs*, London, Novello.

c. By Clara Kathleen Rogers, in vol. II of her *Browning Songs*, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

d. By Malcolm Lawson, for the London Browning Soc. Not published.

6. *Misconceptions*, "This is a spray the Bird clung to." Three settings:

a. By Caroline Reinagle, London, Augener, 188–.

b. By Georgina Schuyler, New York, Schirmer, 1882.

c. By E. C. Gregory, in his *Six Songs*, London, Novello.

7. *In a Year*, "Never any more." One setting: By Caroline Reinagle, London, Augener, 188–.

VII. From Dramatis Personæ, 1864

1. *James Lee's Wife*. Poem I only, *James Lee's Wife Speaks at the Window:* "Ah, Love, but a day And the world has changed." Five settings:

a. By Virginia Gabriel, under title *At the Window*, Philadelphia, Trumpler, 188–.

b. By Clara Kathleen Rogers, Boston, Schmidt, 1890; same in vol. I of her *Browning Songs*, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

c. By Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, Op. 44, No. 2, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

d. By E. C. Gregory, under title *James Lee's Wife*, in his *Six Songs*, London, Novello.

e. By Ethel Harraden, under title *Wilt Thou Change too?* London, Jeffreys.

2. *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. Stanza I only, "Grow old along with me." Set to music by Georgina Schuyler, New York, Schirmer, 1882.

3. *Prospice*. Two settings:

a. By Chas. Villiers Stanford, London, Lucas, Weber & Co., 1884.

b. By Sidney Homer, New York, Schirmer, 1903.

VIII. From Pacchiarotto and How he Worked in Distemper: with other Poems, 1876

1. *Appearances*, "And so you found that poor room dull." One setting: By Clara Kathleen Rogers, in vol. II of her *Browning Songs*, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

IX. From La Saisiaz, 1878

1. The introductory poem, "Good, to forgive; Best, to forget!" Set to music by Clara Kathleen Rogers, in vol. II of her *Browning Songs*, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

X. From the Two Poets of Croisic, 1878 (published in the same volume with *La Saisiaz*)

1. The little poem prefixed, here without title, beginning "Such a starved bank of moss," was entitled in *Selections* of 1880 *Apparitions*. Hence the settings all bear that title. Four settings:

a. By Helen A. Clarke, Boston, The Poet-Lore Co., 1892.

b. By Clara Kathleen Rogers, in vol. I of her *Browning Songs*, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

c. By Signor F. Tetaldi, pub. by the London Browning Soc.

d. By E. C. Gregory, in his *Six Songs*, London, Novello.

XI. From Ferishtah's Fancies, 1884

Lyrics from Ferishtah's Fancies, set to music by Granville Bantock, English and German words, German translation by Joh. Bernhoff, Leipzig, Breitkopf and Härtel, 1905. Contains 12 lyrics and the epilogue, as follows:

1. "Round us the wild creatures."
2. "Wish no word unspoken."
3. "You groped your way across my room."
4. "Man I am and man would be, Love."
5. "Fire is in the flint."
6. "So, the head aches and the limbs are faint."
7. "When I vexed you and you chid me."
8. "Once I saw a chemist."
9. "Verse-making was least of my virtues."
10. "Not with my Soul, Love."
11. "Ask not one least word of praise."

12. "Why from the world?"
13. Epilogue, "Oh, Love — no, Love."

XII. From Asolando, 1889

1. *Summum Bonum*, "All the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee." Set to music by Clara Kathleen Rogers, in vol. I of her *Browning Songs*, Boston, Schmidt, 1900.

APPENDIX C

THE WORD "LATHEN"

IN two places in *The Ring and the Book*, Browning uses the word "lathen." (1) One is in the first book and is in connection with the description of how the Pope meditates over the case (p. 664, ll. 76–80):

> "The manner of his sitting out the dim
> Droop of a sombre February day
> In the plain closet where he does such work,
> With, from all Peter's treasury, one stool,
> One table and one lathen crucifix."

(2) The other is in Count Guido's speech before the judges (p. 737, ll. 38–42):

> "If I baffle you so,
> Can so fence, in the plenitude of right,
> That my poor lathen dagger puts aside
> Each pass o' the Bilboa, beats you all the same, —
> What matters inefficiency of blade?"

On these passages the notes in the Camberwell Edition of Browning are: (1) vol. VI, p. 328:

> "*Lathen:* probably meant for *latten*, a fine kind of brass or bronze used in the Middle Ages for crosses and candlesticks."

(2) Same vol., p. 338:

> "*Lathen* = latten, a kind of brass or bronze. See note, I. 1231."

This is going a long way to explain a simple matter. Looking at the word "lathen," one would suspect that it means *made of lath*, just as "wooden" means *made of wood*, "oaken" *made of oak*, and so on with a score of similar words. Let us try this. We have a "lathen crucifix" and a "lathen dagger" to deal with.

I. Let us take the "lathen dagger" first.

1. Now, it is a fact that in mediæval days the court fool, or jester, frequently had in his outfit a wooden sword, or sword of lath. For

several examples cited, see a standard work, E. K. Chambers, *The Mediæval Stage*, Oxford, 1903, vol. I, p. 387.

2. From this common custom, came the sword made of lath in the hands of the character called the Vice in the mediæval dramas. Chambers, as above, vol. II, pp. 204, 205, says:

> "It must be concluded then that, whatever the name may mean — and irresponsible philology has made some amazing attempts at explanation — the character of the vice is derived from that of the domestic fool or jester. Oddly enough, he is rarely called a fool, although the description of Medwall's *Finding of Truth* mentions 'the foolys part.' But the Elizabethan writers speak of his long coat and lathen sword, common trappings of the domestic fool."

Here in Chambers' discussion we have the very word "lathen" used as a matter of course to describe this sword.

3. Now, very naturally, sword of lath and dagger of lath came to be proverbial expressions. Thus *e.g.* in Shakespeare's 1 Henry IV, Act II, Sc. iv, ll. 126–129, Falstaff says:

> "A king's son! If I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath, and drive all thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild-geese, I'll never wear hair on my face more. You Prince of Wales!"

and in *Twelfth Night*, Act IV, end of Sc. ii, the Clown sings of "the old Vice,"

> "Who, with dagger of lath,
> In his rage and his wrath,
> Cries, ah, ha! to the devil."

Even more to the point, however, is the fact that Robert Browning himself uses the expression "dagger o' lath" in *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* (p. 927, ll. 18–22):

> "Ay, so Sagacity advised him filch
> Folly from fools: handsomely substitute
> The dagger o' lath, while gay they sang and danced,
> For that long dangerous sword they liked to feel,
> Even at feast-time, clink and make friends start."

4. Looking the foregoing facts in the face, there can be no reasonable doubt that "lathen dagger" in Guido's speech means dagger made of lath. And this makes the sense, — the contrast being be-

tween a Bilboa and his own poor ridiculous weapon, both used figuratively.

II. Turning then to the "lathen crucifix," we find the meaning there equally plain. The sentence describes the poverty of the furnishings of the private room in which the Pope is meditating. Consistently with everything else, the crucifix is only a poor rough little thing, made of two pieces of lath with a crude figure of the Christ whittled out and attached to it, — such a crucifix as those to be found in the homes of poor peasants.

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